

# THE RIO GRANDE *Sierran*

PUBLISHED  
BY THE  
RIO GRANDE  
CHAPTER OF  
THE SIERRA CLUB



## THE BIG ONE

The largest flotilla of rubber rafts and kayaks to ever float down White Rock Canyon of the Rio Grande marked the Sierra Club's third annual river trip.

Divided between two Sundays, the May 24 trip was by far the most popular with about 85 persons, 30 or more rafts, and a half dozen friendly kayaks making the 23-mile run in perfect weather. About half that many ran the rapids on May 31. Sierrans came from as far away as Roswell for the fun.

As always, thanks are due to Bob Watt and his crew of volunteers at Los Alamos, and to Explorer Post #20 for use of their Post bus, truck, rafts, life preservers, and boatmen.

\* \* \*

Cecil Carnes, editor of the RIO GRANDE GURGLE, warns that the river runners map appearing in the May/June 1970 issue of NEW MEXICO MAGAZINE, contains a dangerous inaccuracy. The most difficult and dangerous stretch of the Rio Grande in New Mexico is labeled a Grade II run (medium difficulty) rather than Grade VI (limit of navigability, cannot be attempted without risk of life). Watch out!

\* \* \*

And, lastly, the 48-mile stretch of the Rio Grande from the New Mexico-Colorado border to Taos Junction Bridge is now an official "wild river." At the dedication ceremonies atop La Junta Point, Boyd L. Rasmussen, national director of the Bureau of Land Management, said, "We are here not to commemorate what man has done so much as what he has not done--he has not spoiled the river."

The wild river designation and objections by U.S. Sen. Clinton P. Anderson have apparently prevented Parsons and Whittemore from getting Economic Development Administration funds for construction of a pulp plant along the Rio Grande in southern Colorado--at least until such time as P&W can meet federal standards for treatment of waste effluent.

Vol. VIII, No. 3

June 1970

### BLUE RANGE, AGAIN

Southwest Regional Forester William Hurst received an application from The Phelps Dodge Corp. for a drilling site and a primitive road to move heavy equipment 1700 feet within the Blue Range Primitive Area. The road and drilling site would be within the proposed Blue Range Wilderness on which the Forest Service held field hearings last December. The Wilderness Act of 1964 provides for prospecting and locating mineral claims within the National Forest Wilderness until Dec. 31, 1983.

PHOTOGRAPH taken 70 years ago by Gifford Pinchot shows fire scars on a living ponderosa pine. See story on page 6.



1970 WILDERNESS RIVER & OCEAN OUTINGS



GRAND CANYON

Not all the rafts used commercially on the Grand Canyon run are as large or as well-equipped as ours. The ones we used were provided by the American River Touring Association, a group that also conducts many of the Sierra Club's frequent trips down various rivers. NEW YORK TIMES



FAMILY PLAN: 50% reduction for children 12 & under, 25% reduction for young adults 13-17, 10% discount for groups with 10 or more persons that join a regularly scheduled outing. Special charter rates for groups numbering 15 or more persons.

1970 OUTINGS

- GRAND CANYON (Weekly Trips)
- MIDDLE FORK (Id.): (Primitive Area)
- ROGUE RIVER (Ore.) (Siskiyou Mt. Wilds)
- STANISLAUS (Calif.): (Gold Rush Country)
- ST. CROIX-MISS.: (Wis.-Minn. Border)

RESERVE NOW

- Lee's Ferry to Lake Mead, 8 1/2 days
- Phantom Ranch to Lake Mead, 5 1/2 days
- Dagger Falls to Cache Bar, 6 1/2 days
- Indian Creek to Cache Bar, 5 days
- Rogue "Camp & Trail" 5 days
- Rogue "Voyage & Lodge", 4 days
- Every weekend spring, summer & fall
- "An excellent introduction to white-water rafting"
- Two "Photography Specials" on a river trail of autumn leaves.

INTERNATIONAL

- GREAT BARRIER REEF & MAINLAND AUSTRALIA (Frontiers of the South Pacific)
- HEADWATERS OF THE AMAZON IN PERU (Combined sea & land expedition (July & Aug.))
- Two wilderness raft journeys down the Perene, Rio Santa, & Urubamba (May & June)

I would like to receive supplemental information on:

Grand Canyon \_\_\_\_\_ Australia \_\_\_\_\_ Peru \_\_\_\_\_ Stanislaus \_\_\_\_\_  
 Salmon (M.F.) \_\_\_\_\_ Rogue \_\_\_\_\_ Guatemala \_\_\_\_\_ St. Croix-Miss. \_\_\_\_\_  
 NAME \_\_\_\_\_ HOME PHONE \_\_\_\_\_  
 ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ OFFICE PHONE \_\_\_\_\_  
 CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP NO. \_\_\_\_\_

**ARTA** AMERICAN RIVER TOURING ASSN., INC.  
 1016 Jackson Street, Oakland, California 94607  
 (415) 451-8040 or 451-8084

(paid advertisement)

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

April meeting in Las Cruces

--Purpose of the meeting was to acquaint members in Las Cruces with duties and interests of ExCom representatives. Louis Corl was appointed to ExCom to represent the Mesilla Valley Group.

--Discussion of how to keep informed on status of conservation bills in the State Legislature.

--Joe Leach, Dr. Paul Dymont and Jim Sikora of El Paso joined with Las Cruces members in discussion of agricultural use of pesticides. Despite division by a state line, they agreed the problem was of joint concern --if it rains, the residue washes downstream to El Paso; if it blows, the wind carries the drift to Las Cruces.

--Cooperation by members in both cities is also needed in studying the Guadalupe-Carlsbad-Lincoln wilderness area.

May meeting in Albuquerque

--Earth Day was a big success!

--Rio Grande Chapter membership is increasing at about 35-40 percent per year.

--Proposed boundaries are being considered for the November hearing on the Black Range proposed wilderness.

--Discussions on Toxaphene, Blue Range, power plants.

--Sierra Club was co-sponsor of a leadership conference held May 9 in Silver City to define problems in the southwest part of New Mexico (Black Range, Blue Range, wildlife, environmental pollution, resource planning). A surprising amount of expertise appears to exist in the area and another meeting will probably be held.

STUPID ADS

Ever read ads in magazines or see commercials on TV that seem in complete opposition to Sierra Club conservation ideals? Or how about those ads urging more use of power, indestructible plastic containers, or no-return steel cans. Write a letter to the advertiser. Library reference desks can provide the address if necessary. Members report interesting replies.

The Sierran is published six times a year by the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club.

Editor Cherry L. Burns, 1820 Cornell SE, Albuquerque 87106

Associate Editors Dana Douglass, Los Alamos  
 Max K Linn, Albuquerque

Layout Richard Strome, Albuquerque

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Congratulations on the fine issue of the Rio Grande Sierran, January 1970--especially the Don Liska article.

I would just like to comment briefly on the statement on page 1 that "conservation is a unique and primarily American concept." While this is true, it is interesting that the USSR also has developed a conservation problem that it is wrestling with and having the same kind of difficulties that we do. Thus, the Soviet theoretical physicist Andrei Sakharov, often regarded as the major contributor to the development of the Russian H-bomb, has warned that pollution and environmental deterioration are among the most critical problems facing the USSR--and the world. This theme is elaborated in his essay "Progress, Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom" published in this country in 1968 by W. W. Norton. One of his examples is the pollution of Lake Baikal, the world's deepest lake and the largest one in Eurasia. This subject is also discussed in the British science weekly, Nature 223, 1091 (1969).

Guess what the problem is! Wood-pulp and paper mills on the shores of the lake are polluting the lake and threatening wildlife (shades of the Parsons-Whittemore hassle around here). Also, unrestricted tree-felling on the mountain slopes around the lake have denuded considerable areas adjacent to the lake, creating erosion and watershed problems.

The solution? Well, a conference was recently held at Irkutsk to consider this problem. One proposal was setting up some kind of national parks in the area to attract tourists. But because of the remoteness of Baikal, "any such development would involve the construction of hotels, camping sites, cable-ways and the like which would represent some kind of compromise with the demands of the strict conservationists." Shades of the Disney-Mineral King controversy!

So it looks like we are all in the same boat (or rather on the same small planet).

Marvin Van Dilla  
 Los Alamos

(Agreed, that pollution control and problems of environmental degradation are worldwide conservation problems; however, conservation in terms of wilderness conservation, implications of over-population, and conservation of resources is still to a large extent uniquely American in concept--perhaps because American conservationists were among the first to sound the alarm. Editor)

TOXAPHENE AND CATERPILLARS

The Mesilla Valley Group was among the first to warn of danger from applying toxaphene, a chlorinated hydrocarbon, to combat a range caterpillar infestation in New Mexico. Fear was expressed that the spray would poison fish in the Conchas and Ute Reservoirs on the Canadian River in western New Mexico and in Panhandle reservoirs.

Alternatives mentioned were: Dibrome, which dissipates quickly but gives inconsistent results, costs two to three times as much, and does not yet have the Dept. of Agriculture stamp of approval; fire; natural biological controls that might be helped along by man; or wait for the caterpillars to disappear, a historical fact after such a population explosion.

If a public hearing is scheduled by the State Health and Social Services Dept., write your letter of protest.

TIGERS FOR WORK

New members in Las Vegas and other interested conservationists showed up 100-strong April 19 to clean both sides of the Gallinas River. Thirteen volunteers spic-and-spamed the Grand Ave. Bridge the following Sunday. Elmer Schooley reports both the city manager and the mayor "cooperated excellently" by furnishing trucks and drivers and a loader.

Next on the itinerary: plans for a small park along the Gallinas on both sides of the Bridge St. Bridge. The park has been talked about for more than 20 years but has always been based upon obtaining federal aid and grant money. Elmer says, "We want to demonstrate that the locality can create and maintain a park without foreign aid."

OUTINGS SCHEDULE

June 6-7, Gene Gonzales, 409 1/2 Don Miguel, Santa Fe, will lead an overnight backpack trip from Santa Fe ski basin to Cowles.

Don Lyngholm, Box 993, Shiprock, N.M., has offered to lead the following trips:

July 3-5, narrow gauge railroad trip to Needleton for a backpack from Animas Canyon to Vallecito Campground. May be combined with a wilderness threshold trip.

Sept. 5-7, exploration of the upper parts of Canyons de Chelly and del Muerto.

# SAN JUAN - CHAMA PROJECT

Headwaters of the Colorado River will start to flow through the Continental Divide into the Rio Grande when the snow in Blanco Basin melts in the spring of 1971. The \$90-million San Juan-Chama Project of the Bureau of Reclamation will deliver 110,000 acre/feet of water annually.

Construction began in April 1963 on three diversion dams, two siphons, and 27 miles of tunnels in the mountains between Pagosa Springs, Colo., and Chama, N.M. This work will be finished next fall. In addition, a storage dam which will form Heron Reservoir, south of Chama, is nearly completed. When released, water from Heron Reservoir will flow by way of Rio Chama through El Vado Reservoir, on down through Abiquiu Reservoir, and then into the Rio Grande about eight miles above Espanola.

Under terms of the enabling legislation, minimum flow in the headwater streams is being maintained, and studies are constantly being made to improve water quality. BIM officials are working with the Department of Agriculture to develop foliage which will provide cover for the material removed from the tunnels. Tree clearing and road building by contractors has been held to a minimum.

New Mexico's Game and Fish Department plans a wildlife reserve for big game in the area west of Park View, and the National Park Service will develop a number of trails and camping areas in the vicinity of Heron Reservoir.

All this is the most ambitious effort in the long history of the struggle of people in the Rio Grande valley to get water when and where it will do them the most good. Such attempts were primarily local and relatively simple until the early 1920's when the Bureau of Reclamation was formed with the stated purpose of conservation and development of water resources in the 17 contiguous western states.

Planning for the San Juan-Chama Project got underway when the Colorado River Compact of 1922 apportioned that river's waters to the thirsty states in the Colorado Basin. New Mexico often did not receive all the water apportioned to her. As a result, the State of Colorado agreed to construction of works to provide for delivery of sufficient water to New Mexico in both the 1938 Rio Grande Compact, and the 1946 Upper Colorado River Compact. In 1958, the Colorado River Storage Project established criteria for evaluating such works.

Left--another view of Heron Dam in Willow Creek Canyon from rim on the south side of Chama River.

(All photos from Bureau of Reclamation)

In July 1958, Sen. Clinton P. Anderson presided at the first hearing on his bill authorizing "the San Juan-Chama project as a participating project of the Colorado River storage project." More than 20 New Mexicans went to Washington to testify for the bill. Opposition was expressed by a few Texans, some Californians, and a man from Elephant Butte Irrigation District--all alarmed by what might happen to their downstream interests.

The Senate passed the bill that year, but it didn't get out of Colorado Rep. Wayne Aspinall's House committee. By 1962, however, both branches of Congress did pass it and President Kennedy signed the bill on June 13.

This law (PL 87-483) states that the Project is "for the principal purposes of furnishing water supplies to approximately 39,300 acres of land in the Cerro, Taos, Llano, and Pojoaque tributary irrigation units in the Rio Grande Basin and approximately 81,600 acres of land in the existing Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District and for municipal, domestic, and industrial uses, and providing recreation and fish and wildlife benefits."

Residents in the Cerro, Taos, Llano, and Pojoaque tributary irrigation units will be able to retain more of their annual run-off for supplemental irrigation water instead of contributing it to the Rio Grande as they must do now. Under the law, the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, an irrigation unit stretching from Cochiti to below Socorro, will receive supplemental irrigation water directly. The city of Albuquerque also has contracted for about half of all Project water for municipal and industrial purposes.

Another law provides for use of Project water for recreation purposes at Cochiti Dam on the Rio Grande about 40 miles north of Albuquerque.

In the unlikely event that there is unallocated water remaining, other towns and political entities along the Rio Grande in New Mexico will be able to present requests for its use.

In Bureau of Reclamation projects like this, beneficiaries pay for maintenance and operation of the new systems. In the San Juan-Chama Project, water and power revenues from the Upper Colorado River Basin Fund contribute toward paying the cost of construction

of irrigation projects related to the Upper Colorado Storage Project. New Mexico has a share in this Fund.

To become participating beneficiaries in the Fund, political subdivisions (the "tributary irrigation units" mentioned in PL 87-483) must be able to contract with the federal government. Red tape and legal explanations are intricate and controversy over the desirability of forming such political subdivisions has developed in spite of intensive efforts to inform possible beneficiaries. For example, people in Espanola are considering all the aspects of their proposed Llano Project very carefully. The Taos and Cerro Units are still undergoing final investigations. On April 21, 1970, residents in the Pojoaque area voted to form an irrigation district which will allow them to take full advantage of the situation. Earlier, several ditch groups near Abiquiu formed the Rio Chama Ditch Consolidated Association for much the same purpose.

Effects of the San Juan-Chama Project will be far reaching and important, but obviously nobody can tell now just what they will be. Many New Mexicans seem remarkable unaware of the significance of the Project--or even that it exists, for that matter. Whatever happens, we are all certain to learn more about it soon.

(Fern Lyon)

\* \* \*

If Sierra Club members are interested in seeing the diversion works in the Chama area, a tour (minimum of 12 persons) can be arranged through L. J. Nelson of the Bureau of Reclamation's Santa Fe office, tel. 982-3801, ext. 332.

The Editor wishes to thank our outside contributors, Mrs. Lyon and Mr. Collins, for their feature articles. A continuing series of such articles is planned to supply our membership with additional information and a variety of viewpoints.



## FIRE -- NATURE'S FRIEND

Have your summer vacation plans ever been spoiled by a newspaper headline, "National Forests Closed Because of Extreme Fire Danger"? Such things have happened and will be more common in the future unless fire hazards are reduced. The entire multiple use program of the Forest Service is endangered.

At the time the National Forests and Parks were being set aside, there was opposition from disgruntled lumbermen and stockmen who had always considered the full and free use of the national domain as their right. But, accord was reached on one point: the need to protect the forest lands from fire. Early day visitors and settlers viewed fire as an agent of destruction; they did not understand how nature had used fire in maintaining an ecological balance.

Today's problems in land management are not errors of nature but the result of man's activities: continued overgrazing of public lands and propagandizing fire as the monster of the forests. Nature made a friend out of fire and used it as a management tool.

In New Mexico and Arizona ponderosa pine makes up about 80 percent of commercial timbered land. These forests are also important for watersheds, wildlife, and recreation--all interrelated needs.

I observed fire and many of its ramifications during 15 years spent in fire control work in the Southwest. In 1954 I was on a rather stubborn fire in the Apache National Forest. The Fire Control Officer, an "old timer," commented, "At one time we controlled this kind of fire with 10 or 15 men. Now it takes from 100 to 200 men to get the job done." From then on I studied old records, pictures, anything that might reveal information on fire behavior (at

RANGE LANDS denuded from sheep grazing (left) contrasts sharply with forest land where grazing was prohibited. Early day photos by Gifford Pinchot, courtesy of the U.S. Forest Service.

that time there was no fire research in the Southwest).

New studies were started in cooperation with a few of the National Forests in New Mexico and Arizona. The Weather Bureau's Fire Weather Forecasters furnished and interpreted the weather portion of the studies.

Early forest users reported that the ponderosa pine forests had an open and clean appearance, which is verified by old military pictures and those taken by Gifford Pinchot in 1900. One of Pinchot's pictures shows a live tree with fire scars. His study of this tree revealed that fires in this area averaged one every eight years for the previous 115 years. Since low intensity fires may not leave scars, even more fires may have occurred.

Nature used fire as a scavenger in consuming excessive accumulations of debris, such as dried pine needles, limbs severed in natural pruning processes, and dead trees resulting from natural mortality. Fire also thins out and consumes young trees that are growing too thick to survive. The result is a clean-appearing forest floor which contributes to the general health of the timber stand as well as reduces the fire hazard. Low intensity fires can help maintain a low hazard condition, materially reducing the chances of fire destroying the entire forest and its environment.

Although fire is one of the important tools used by nature in her management program,

insects, disease, and mistletoe also help to maintain an ecological balance.

Since the start of the "full fire protection policy" (prevent, discover, and control all fires), man's goal has been to battle with each and every fire burning under wild-land conditions. Earliest Forest Service records indicate that in its Southwest region, between 1911-20, the yearly average of fires was 479, including 220 caused by lightning. This contrasts to the yearly average of 2253 (including 1938 lightning-caused) for the period 1957-66. An analysis of reports of one New Mexico National Forest, dating back through 1911, indicated that in early days damaging fires occurred mainly in areas that had been logged with no follow-up disposal of slash (tree tops, noncommercial logs, and other debris). At this time there were very few forest officers to fight fire, detection and communications were poor, most lightning fires were of low intensity, and very few were controlled.

Large areas of ponderosa pine had been cut over by 1933 when the Civilian Conservation Corps was established. The young men enrolled in this program became a vast reservoir of manpower available for fire control and an all-out effort was made to discover and control all fires as fast as possible.

This full protection program became a factor in accumulation of forest debris which makes fires more destructive by increasing the volume of heat and rate of spread.

Ponderosa pine grows in even aged stands. These stands vary in size from a fraction of an acre to several acres. After maturity, man can do nothing to keep the trees from dying; nature uses fire, insects, and disease to kill the old to make way for the new. Many new stands got their start following a fire which consumed sufficient surface litter to allow seed to reach the soil. And fire was a thinning agent when a combination of good seed years and moist soil resulted in too many seedlings competing with one another for space and soil food.

The full protection program also affected wildlife forage. Deer obtained forage from the forbs and herbaceous cover that existed in the open parks and pine stands. Fire had reduced the debris and thinned the stands of dense young trees to a point where these forage species of plants were not choked out. Fire protection has hindered this process and in some areas the deer population is reported to be diminishing.

A controlled burn was made about nine years ago on 300 acres of pine in the Gila Wilderness Area. The objective was to reduce the number of young trees to see if wildlife forage would improve. Too many young trees were in the area because of a combination of fire protection and soil exposure resulting from pre-1955 overgrazing by sheep and cattle. Unfortunately, the burn was made a little too late in the season after the summer rains had started and surface fuels were moist, and it was initially considered a failure because very few trees were killed.

Two years later when we examined the area, nearly all the deer observed during a day's horseback ride were within the burn. Apparently the fire reduced the pine needles and twigs on the ground sufficiently to allow forbs to gain a foothold.

All this points to the need for implementing certain programs:

1) Forest administrators and related research agencies must channel present fire management knowledge into immediate programs to restore the forests to a more natural condition.

(Continued on page 8)

## A Day on the River

23 miles in an isolated 1000' deep canyon of the Rio Grande

- Rubber rafts with multiple air chambers
- No noisy motors
- Skilled oarsmen
- Trip includes picnic lunch and transportation back to your car.

Call (505)-662-6185

Or Write

Rio Grande Whitewater Adventures, Inc.  
3536 Arizona Ave.  
Los Alamos, New Mexico 87544

THE RIO GRANDE SIERRAN  
Cherry L. Burns, Editor  
1820 Cornell SE  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106

Please find enclosed \$1.00  in payment for my subscription to The Rio Grande Sierran  
for the Calendar Year 1970 or \$  as a donation, \$1.00 of which is for my subscrip-  
tion. Checks should be made payable to Rio Grande Chapter, Sierra Club.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
Please print name \_\_\_\_\_  
also address if \_\_\_\_\_  
changed in last \_\_\_\_\_  
month. \_\_\_\_\_

Fire--Nature's Friend (Cont. from page 7)

- 2) Forestry schools should give more attention to the subject of fire, perhaps offer a degree in Fire Management.
- 3) Require adequate disposal of slash following logging.
- 4) Until hazards can be reduced, continue full protection to the pine forests during the critical part of the fire season, but be very selective in control efforts during the balance of the year when controlled burning projects may be safely conducted.
- 5) Give special consideration to programs that will aid in restoring Wilderness Areas and National Parks to a hazard level in line with desired ecological balance.

(C. K. Collins)

THE RIO GRANDE SIERRAN  
Cherry L. Burns, Editor  
1820 Cornell SE  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106

Non-Profit Organization

GARDENING AIDS

Still confused about how to combat garden insects without wrecking the world ecosphere? CALIFORNIA TOMORROW, Monadnock Bldg., 681 Market St., San Francisco, 94105, has a handy guide. Recommended botanicals (natural poisons) include nicotine sulphate, pyrethrum, and rotenone. Malathion is the safest synthetic, followed by carbaryl (Sevin), which however is extremely toxic to honey bees. If possible, use non-poisonous controls such as dormant oil, water blast, or predators.

Strictly taboo are any house and garden pest control products that contain Aldrin, Chlordane, DDD, DDT, Dieldrin, Endrin, Heptachlor, Kelthane, Lindane, Methoxychlor, Ovex, Tedion, Thiodan, Toxaphene, and other chlorinated hydrocarbons.



BULK RATE  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Permit No. 113

1005075 2Y-0521  
BRANT CALKIN  
RT 1 BOX 267  
SANTA FE NEW MEXICO 87501