

Here is a reprint of Paul Breeding's article from SWS #145 involving his 2007 cruises to Glendo Lake in Wyoming, Lake Powell on the Utah/Arizona border, and Starvation Lake in Northeastern Utah:

SkiffAmerica 20 Break-in Cruises

by Paul Breeding

In the October 2005 issue of SWS I wrote an article on the building of a SkiffAmerica 20. An outboard powered skiff with accommodations for boat camping, gunkholing and exploring. Although not a sailboat, it does meet the criteria of shallow draft; 6+” motor up, 15-18” motor down.

At the time of the original article the boat was essentially complete but not fitted out. If you recall heart surgery interfered with my planned completion date. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise: our boating season ends here abruptly with the first cold front (usually around mid October). I had a woodstove in the shop and could work on the finishing and fitting out details through much of the winter. This delayed launch gave me time for that and time to add some cosmetic touches. However it is not a museum piece, I suggest that critics view the finished product from a distance of at least 10'. None the less IMHO it is an attractive craft, an opinion often validated at launch ramps, gas stations, rest stops, etc. Compliments from friends and strangers are quite gratifying to this boat builder.

In the summer of 2006 it was ready for launch, a good friend from Maryland; George Beneman, flew here to help with the initial splash. All went well, though this boat like many boats still had many things to teach me. I'm an old sailor, I'm not savvy to power boats, steerable thrust, and going in a straight line, etc. so there remains much to learn. Unlike a centerboard craft, this has a very clean, shallow, flat bottom with little wetted surface. In addition it has a high freeboard (aka windage). As soon as I get below steering speed the wind takes over causing me to make several runs at the dock prior to success, however I am improving.

When lightly loaded and at my altitude (4 - 6,000') the top speed is 17+ mph. It will gently rise to a plane at about 8 mph, the speed I am most comfortable with. I am told by others that nearer sea level it should top out at about 20 mph. But if I am on the water, I am already where I want to be and in no hurry.

In the West everything water wise is far away, so in planning for the boat and my needs I wanted a first class trailer. I chose a Florida built aluminum - torsion axle trailer with 13" wheels. The aluminum keeps the weight down; the low slung torsion axle gives a low center of gravity with good stability on the interstate and is friendly to shallow ramps. The boat / motor / trailer / personal gear registers on the scales at 1,500# +/- . My HONDA Odyssey van has a 3,500# rated towing capacity, a comfortable safety margin. In 4,000+ miles of towing I am satisfied and looking forward to many more miles, many more lakes / rivers to explore.

The 2006 summer after the initial launch and some familiarity runs on local lakes I was ready for travel and overnight boat camping. Two hundred miles north of Denver is Glendo

Lake in Wyoming, a man made lake on the North Platte River. Glendo is 12,500 acres when full with up to (or down to) 100+' of depth, a length of 18+ miles with a scenic western view of the Rocky Mountains, a long sandy beach, and many quiet coves. But for me the highlight is the 3+ miles of river canyon cut through solid rock many eons ago, the vertical walls, stratified layers of rock formation and a variety of colors are a sight to behold when viewed from the water on a slow moving boat in the early morning light with a thermos of hot coffee, having a camera handy would not be a bad idea. Although I camped aboard nosed up into the shallow water of a reeded cove, the car and trailer were parked at the adjoining campsite. This was my first overnight on the boat, anchored in shin deep fresh water, an adult beverage in my hand, the full moon rising, not too bad. Of course on shake down cruises there is a learning curve starting with what you forgot to bring, then trying to remember where you packed various items you did bring.

The next major outing was in the early spring of 07', spring doesn't arrive in Colorado until late May and even then it can be accompanied with snow. However we decided to head for the upper portions of Lake Powell on the Utah / Arizona border for a week of boat camping / exploring / hiking and photo ops (of which there are plenty) the first week of May. The we is I and a couple from Maryland (friends from many years, sharing many adventures experiences, trips and near calamities over the years). While driving the 500 miles to Bullfrog marina we had to stop at Rifle Falls in western Colorado, Goblin Valley in Utah and gawk at the incredibly beautiful landscape. The plan once we were on Powell was to find a place for Karen & Richard to set up their tent while I would sleep on the boat, a place to hike from. Although the water level is down about 100' we often saw 200' or more showing on the depth meter. This depth balanced by solid rock vertical walls many hundreds of feet high. When leaving Bullfrog marina there was maybe 2 miles of an open bay prior to entering the rock wall canyon heading southwest (or downriver) for the next 20 some miles. With the sheer towering rock walls and the very deep water there was no place to anchor and camp until we reached the Escalante River, we then proceeded upstream for a couple of miles finally reaching a sandy spit with enough soil to both drive tent pegs in and to drive a couple of anchoring pins to secure the boat, all else was solid rock. With the security of two pins in the ground and two anchors off the stern in the deep waters of the Escalante I was comfortable that the boat was safe, only one night did I need to get up to reset the stern anchors as the strong night winds were banging the hull against those colorful red rocks. Earlier that day the wind completely collapsed and relocated K & R's tent, none the less the first night we dined and sipped under a rising full moon.

I should note here that neither cell phones nor VHF radios can reach anyone should you need help. The local advice for seeking aid is to wait for a passing vessel (this time of the year there are few), hope they have their radio on, call them ask them to relay your message and if all goes well someone will be contacted. Fortunately for us we never needed aid as we were completely self contained and cautious. While at this campsite we spent a day hiking up to the plateau, photographing vistas and such along the way. As it was early spring in the desert many of the few flowers were in bloom, wherever there is a trace of moisture something will be growing, an encouraging sign.

Another day was spent slowly motoring up the shallow waters of the Escalante, poking into coves, marveling at the rock formations, the stratification, awed by the array of colors, strengthened by the majesty of it all. As we know one of the advantages of boat camping is not being restricted too much by weight considerations and to a lesser degree by space concerns. So we had plenty of food / water / fuel onboard (although I worried a bit about fuel consumption). I cooked all meals on board with a small two burner propane stove; we ate all meals on board.

This was my first experience with the boat for a multi-night trip with three people. It worked quite well, but I think mostly because the three of us had been through many other trips together and understood the choreography required for three people, three days on a 20' boat. I think the boat will work best for long camping trips with two and their required gear.

The next major trip for 07' was to Starvation Lake in Northeastern Utah, I don't know why the lake was so named, and looking at the local population starvation is not a problem. The reason for this trip is a messabout put together by Jim Thayer, a boat builder in western Colorado. Though many of the attendees are from the Salt Lake area, there a few from Colorado and Wyoming, mostly sailboats, some kayaks, many homebuilt and one powered skiff (mine). As expected I got a fair amount of good natured ribbing regarding having a motor, however many questioning admirers wanted a ride; it provided a mobile controllable platform as the photo boat and took next year's planners to portions of the lake they had never seen. Of course as so often the case when boaters get together the highlight is the Saturday evening potluck with great food, greater camaraderie, stories regaled, truth stretched and a good time had by all.

The area of the lake we used provided minimal camping but practically exclusive to this group, this was however before the Memorial Day start of the season. For me it was a chance to see waters and portions of the west for the first time. Nearby are Dinosaur National Monument, and other sights and curios of the west.

Perhaps some members would like to drag their boats here to explore what the west has to offer water wise. If so I willingly offer, lodging, advice, going along, sharing maps and stories, etc. - pbreedingco2@msn.com.