

'Buzz' Holstrom Worried About Safety of Colorado River Party

Buzz Holstrom, last to conquer the treacherous Colorado river on a solo expedition from Green River, Utah, to Boulder dam several months ago, came to Las Vegas today from Pierce's Ferry, outpost on Boulder lake 80 miles from the dam, to find out about the Nevills expedition, and shook his head hopelessly and said he was "actually worried" when he found that no word had been received about the four men and two women.

"I made the trip from Green River to Lee's Ferry in 10 days, and they already have been out 18 days, and with the river flowing three times normal, their chances aren't so good. I came through when the river was low, and there are a lot of advantages in making a river trip with falling water."

Drawing a crude map on a piece of paper, Holstrom described the hazardous course he followed and the trip the Nevills party is now making.

"Cataract Canyon is 42 miles

long and is the real graveyard of the Colorado river," he said. "More parties have been lost there than anyplace else along the river. I guess it is because it is the first really rough water encountered, but from my experience, I would say that worse hazards lie ahead if they get out of Cataract Canyon.

"If they should lose their boats and try to walk out, it would be like walking into a death trap. Even if they did not drown, and their chances of getting out of the river with the water so high are negligible, they might be able to scale the mountains and get on top. Then the worst would begin as it is 50 miles to the nearest town of Hanksville, Utah, where only a handful of people live. Across that terribly rough country, cut by canyons, ravines, and washes, there is no water, and in this hot weather, no man or woman could make it.

"If the boats are lost, the chances of the boats or the pieces

(Continued on Page Three)

BUZZ HOLSTROM

washing down to Lee's Canyon this season are few. They might come down in a year or two, but not right away.

"At the end of Cataract Canyon is the 'Dirty Devil River,' and it lives up to its name so well that it actually smells bad. But it is welcome, because it is the beginning of smoother water on the Colorado, for 160 miles to Lee's Ferry.

"After Lee's Ferry comes 60 miles of Marble Canyon and 190 miles of Grand Canyon. I consider this the hardest part of the trip, because there are sheer canyon walls, and almost no chance of beaching the boats or picking up a boat once it is lost. After that comes Mead lake and quiet water.

"The high water will flow so much faster, that losing a boat in Cataract Canyon would mean real trouble. It would be very hard for them to get out of the river and chances of drowning are much greater," Holstrom said.

Commenting on the equipment of the Nevills party, Holstrom said that he had seen pictures of the boats and understood they were made of plywood and added that he didn't think they were so "hot" for the hazardous trip planned by the party. He said that he had corresponded with Nevills prior to the start of the expedition and had given him some information on the trip.

"Nevills should be a competent river man, as he has been taking parties down the San Juan river to where it flows into the Colorado, below Cataract Canyon, and then down to Lee's Ferry for several years. I believe that he knows his business, but I don't think that he has had any experience with the rapids, and that is the dangerous part of the trip."

Experienced river men around Boulder City, unwilling to be quoted directly, have stated that they consider the presence of the women in the party as one of the hazards, as they are "so much baggage" and probably

west across the sagebrush covered flats toward the ranch meadows along the Humboldt river.

Galvanized iron fences, with

would need help in an emergency. Holstrom said he considered the extreme heat in the canyons one of the worst factors to be encountered in the trip.

"It took me only two and a half days to come through Cataract Canyon. I suppose the reason this part of the trip is known as the 'graveyard of the Colorado' is that the water is so rough that many parties never get out of it. Along the river at this point, there is a small beach, and it would be possible for the three boatmen to put the two women and the artist-photographer passengers on shore and let them walk while the other three men took the boats through the rapids.

"Their boats are 16 feet long, one foot longer than mine was, but they are loaded much more heavily, and the water is flowing more swiftly than when I came down alone."

Holstrom, former filling station operator at Coquille, Oregon, and veteran river boatman, is now employed by the Grand Canyon-Boulder Dam Tours, Inc., and has been stationed at Pierce's Ferry. Short in stature and broad chested, with powerful forearms, and tanned a deep bronze color, Holstrom appears to be in condition for another battle with the mighty Colorado, but he demurred when asked if he should like to be with the party.

"I am glad I'm not on that trip, but I certainly hope they get through all right. I couldn't get any word about the party at Pierce's Ferry, so I decided to come to town and find out whether anything definite has been heard from them. I am actually worried about their safety."

Holstrom said that he could only guess what is happening to the party but that whatever the "breaks" that come their way, the Nevills party will have a hard trip. Observers state that Holstrom's opinion on the trip probably is the best of any living man, as he was the last one to make the trip down the river a few months ago.