BOOK REVIEWS

First Through Grand Canyon: The Secret Journals and Letters of the 1869 Crew Who Explored the Green and Colorado Rivers, Fourth Revised Edition, Michael P. Ghiglieri, Puma Press, 2022, 367 pages, ISBN 978-0-9700973-2-3, \$22.95.

hat did John Wesley Powell really write in 1869? In the spring 2023 issue of the BQR, boatman and author Michael Ghiglieri explained how he wrote *First Through Grand*

Canyon. The first edition appeared in 2003, and, now, twenty years later is the revised and expanded fourth edition. which is probably the last printing. (Disclosure: This reviewer conducted and edited the interview, and wrote the Foreword and transcribed the "astronomical data" for an Appendix.) Many people read

and quote John Wesley Powell from his 1875 Report Upon the Colorado River of the West, but mostly from his 1895 publication, Canyons of the Colorado, reprinted many times as The Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons, none of which is, or contains, his original 1869 journal. Starting with a 1939 publication, the journals of Powell and his 1869 and 1871-72 crew members have been transcribed and published, and reprinted verbatim, containing the same errors in transcription. These all had been organized by individual, which required conferring with multiple volumes for daily entries of events. A 1988 publication (reprinted in 2004) sought to improve that by providing

a day-by-day reading. While useful that way, unfortunately the author once again did not make needed corrections, and compounded the problem by introducing some new errors and troublesome editing.

Ghiglieri and his daughter Crystal have gone back to the original documents—journals, letters, newspaper articles—to compile new transcriptions of daily events. If you are interested in what happened on Powell's inaugural river trip in 1869, Ghiglieri's work is the most accurate

version to read and the one that I refer to 99 percent of the time (a guess, but almost exclusively). It's one of my "ready reference" volumes on Canyon and River history, always at hand. Of course, there is a lot more to this book than just the diaries, which sometimes don't explain everything. For instance, in the diaries the separation of the Howlands and Dunn

receives sparse mention and little explanation. Extensive front and back matter put the men and events into perspective. It is important to read more than just the diaries to find out about Ghiglieri's sources, interpretations, opinions, and conclusions, and compare them with your other readings about Powell and river history to form your own. There are some classic romanticized quotes to be recited from The Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons. But please don't think that is the entire, factual story. Read First Through Grand Canyon to compare and contrast. On his 1889-90 river trips, historian Robert Brewster Stanton doubted Powell's 1875

Report—Stanton surely would have liked to have had this book with him on his river trips.

For folks living in or near Flagstaff, *First Through Grand Canyon* may be purchased at a river-runner co-owned and independent Bright Side Bookshop; or order online www.brightsidebookshop.com; and possibly from Amazon or non-profit Grand Canyon Conservancy. For a signed copy, send a check for \$22.95 + \$2.95 to Michael Ghiglieri, 6233 E. Abbey Rd., Flagstaff, AZ 86004.

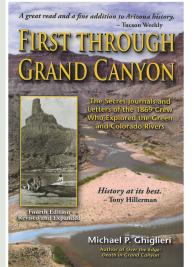
Richard Quartaroli

Brave the Wild River: The Untold Story of Two Women Who Mapped the Botany of the Grand Canyon, Melissa L. Sevigny, W.W. Norton, 2023, 290 pp, ISBN 978-0-0393-86823-4, \$30.

elissa L. Sevigny's Brave the Wild River: The Untold Story of Two Women Who Mapped the Botany of the Grand Canyon opens with botanist Lois Jotter waiting for her five crewmates on a river sandbar in Utah. It's Day Four of the 1938 Nevills Expedition on the Colorado River. Two of the trip's three wooden boats are beached near Jotter. Unsure how many of the crew have survived Cataract Canyon's high and wild whitewater, Jotter does what she'll do many times on the 43-day journey: she wonders if she made a mistake in joining it.

From *Brave*'s first scene through its final chapters, Sevigny takes us on a good river trip. She also convinces us that the historic crew risked their lives for high ideals: passion for work, good science, and grand adventure.

Sevigny's long-overdue portrait of the first botanists to scientifically classify Grand Canyon flora both grips and informs us. A desert native and award-winning science journalist



on KNAU (Arizona Public Radio), she excels in reporting on water, agriculture, and exploration (often of space). She also whips jaw-dropping metaphor from thin air, not losing momentum as she weaves beautiful poetry through a clear, engaging narrative.

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MELISSA L. SEVIGNY

In 1938, Michiganbased botany instructor and researcher Elzada Clover teamed with whitewater pioneer Norm Nevills to boat the Colorado. Clover aimed to gain access to the flora in canyon country. Nevills planned to extend his riverrunning business downstream of Utah.

Neither Clover nor Nevills had boated the Canyon before.

Stakes were high: women who'd attempted the run hadn't survived it. Nevills knew how much the future of commercial river running depended on the trip's safe passage. Time was short: Clover understood that geographically limited plant species would soon be lost to reservoirs that were planned or already filling. Clover invited Jotter and another Michigan colleague, Gene Atkinson, to assist with the science, while Nevills built three plywood Cataract boats and recruited two men (engineer Don Harris and photographer Bill Gibson) to row.

On June 20, 1938, the crew launched on a lively, swollen Green River. Downstream, the Green would meet the high-water Colorado (running 50,000 cubic feet per second at the confluence, about thirty percent above flood stage). A media storm raged all around, labeling the "daring boat trip" an ill-prepared venture to collect "botanical freaks." Experienced river runners opined that the mix of women, untried boats, and high water would end in tragedy.

Meanwhile the crew put their hearts and muscle into the daily business

of getting downstream. Clover and Jotter rose before dawn to collect plant specimens—some familiar, some not—for their wood-and-paper presses. Clover specialized in cacti, Jotter in primroses, but they sampled and described everything they could.

> The women would return to camp to cook breakfast, help line boats and portage gear around rapids, and ride with enthusiasm through whitewater Nevills deemed runnable. Boating pioneer **Buzz Holmstrom** met them at Lees Ferry and noted. "The women in the party are really doing better than the men." Nevills agreed: "The women are standing up beautifully

so far,' he recorded, but he had a complaint about every one of the men." (As a remedy, Nevills swapped a few boatmen at Lees Ferry and added Emery Kolb as an experienced advisor.)

Sevigny draws from expeditionary journals and archives throughout the West, plumbing the historic boaters' own words for their rich humanity. Nevills and Holmstrom are seen expanding their perspectives about gender and river livelihoods. Independent, brilliant Clover has come for the plants (and finds them) but also falls for the river, turning to poetry to express love and longing for it. Jotter bonds with "shy, funny, and self-deprecating" Holmstrom, who changes his mind about women not belonging "in the Canyon of the Colorado." Nevills, anxious while leading the green crew, sees the end of his boating career lurking around every river bend.

Often, while sketching nuanced, flesh-and-blood portraits of Clover and Jotter, Sevigny reminds us they "weren't just women: they were botanists." Yet they couldn't help but shatter myths about gender, despite its irrelevance to their science dreams. As media hysteria grew, Jotter wrote home to reassure her family that warnings about trip risks and women running rivers were exaggerated. Clover, so key to the expedition that her name belongs beside Nevills' in its historic title, believed that Bessie and Glen Hyde's 1928 run made Bessie the first non-indigenous woman through-boater in the Canyon.

Clover and Jotter both "seem determined never to complain about the hard work and danger," as the eyes of history turned to them. In private, they believed that "running the river was less dangerous than collecting plants, with sheer walls to scale and things that stung or stabbed in every corner." Clover wrote, "You've no idea how difficult it is to keep the mind on mere plants when the river is roaring & the boats are struggling to get through." Her commitment to succeeding, and Jotter's, is part of their legacy as steely-eyed river women.

Sevigny drives us toward an ending we can't pretend not to know. River maps and guidebooks tell us that Clover and Jotter survived and thrived, while Nevills grew his reputation in professional boating. The river worked its magic "tying [the crew] together" throughout their lives. Still, Sevigny's narrative holds us like a familiar campfire story told in a fresh, captivating voice.

Brave is a welcome and important contribution to Grand Canyon literature that will fit on nonfiction bookshelves somewhere between Wallace Stegner's Beyond the Hundredth Meridian and Louise Teal's Breaking into the Current. Sevigny, too, pioneers new currents in the genre with extensive, informed passages on indigenous culture and consistent, refreshing use of genderinclusive language.

Above all, like any good trip down the challenging, deeply beloved Colorado, *Brave the Wild River* invites us to return again and again.

Rebecca Lawton