

# DUNBAR – HUNTER OUACHITA RIVER EXCURSION

**December 18-21, 2004**

## **In Celebration of the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

These notes are drawn from my journal taken on the excursion and respectfully submitted. Timothy Richardson

More information on the EARA web site: [www.arkie.net/~eara/](http://www.arkie.net/~eara/)

### - EXCURSION NOTES: THE LOWER ARKANSAS OUACHITA RIVER -

#### *The View from the Back of the Boat*

##### *Preface:*

Back in 1803, under President Thomas Jefferson, a huge tract of land was transferred from France to the United States in the biggest land deal in our country's history. At that time nearly doubling the size of the United States because the Louisiana Purchase contains 863,072 square miles, or 565,166,080 acres. The Purchase is larger than Great Britain, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, and Portugal all combined. The first order of business was to explore the newly acquired territory and determine what natural resources could be sold in an effort to replenish the federal coffers which were already \$8 million dollars in debt before the \$15 million (plus 6% interest) purchase. To this end Jefferson sent out exploration parties including most notably Lewis and Clark, Zebulon Pike, Freeman and Custis and of course, Dunbar and Hunter. In 1804 the Dunbar – Hunter expedition came into present day Arkansas up the Washita or Ouachita River to the 'boiling springs' or Hot Springs. This gave Jefferson the first scientific or enlightened glimpse at just what the purchase had brought.

As a matter of celebration and recognition of this exciting time of discovery the Early Arkansas Reenactors Association, Inc. built a representation of an early keelboat that would have been used by Dunbar and Hunter on the leg of the expedition from Fort Miro (now Monroe, Louisiana) to Hot Springs. The story that follows is about the excursion we made during the same time of the year that Dunbar and Hunter did 200 years earlier. This keelboat will now be used as a stage from which to make presentations and demonstrations for several years.

#### Day 1:

##### Saturday, December 18, 2004

*Camden (Ecore Fabre) Launch*

*N33 degrees 35.513', W92 degrees 49.194'*

*1 PM Air temperature was nearly 60 degrees*

Throngs of public gathered about to see the launching of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Dunbar - Hunter expedition. Even Camden's mayor and his



associates came out in black leather on their Harley Horses. The good mayor helped us finish filling our 30 gallons of drinking water in the two Gibbs Brothers water kegs which set on the steering deck next to the cabin back wall.

Newspaper reporters and the general public were taking lots of images as we prepared to step into history. An air of excitement prevailed as we prepared the EARA



keelboat for her trip down the Ouachita River. It surely seemed like there were lots of little things that needed to be done. It took a while to load the boat and most of the gear was simply stacked inside her cabin since we have had little experience stowing overnight camping gear.

After Ed Williams's little launching ceremony, that being the reading of the rules and the prayer, we began the launching of the boat.

Ed backed the boat down the ramp and with a jerk or two the boat slid off its wagon into the waters of the Ouachita River. We brought the 40 foot keelboat up to the shore where Ed could crawl board her. The crew of five made way after Ed said "make way, make way all!" It was nearly 1 PM before we actually departed. As the power was applied to the four oars and we began to move, I hollered out to the excited crowd, "*Which way is down river?!*" To which they all, in unison, pointed down river! We all got a chuckle over that. It was interesting to watch several of them follow us down river at various points where the roads came near the river. One fellow in particular, a retired country lawyer from Eldorado named Worth Camp Jr., enjoyed hollering out to us from the bank explaining about the history we were passing. He will show up later again.



Beginning this adventure we five, Ed Williams of Little Rock, Chris Bliss of Conway, Daniel Casey of Beebe, Bob Rogers of Forth Worth and myself, Tim Richardson, of Little Rock, departed the Camden Sandy Beach boat ramp, all in clean clothes and in good spirits. What laid before us none of us knew, only that adventure was to be

our companion for the next few days and we were eager to be on our way and seek out our challenges.

By 3 PM we were passing a deer camp nearly 10 miles down river near marker 330.0. As the northwest wind was to our backs, we were making good time with oars and sail on such occasion as would allow.

A bit further down the river we saw a flat barge of local folks and they came near us with curiosity in their faces. The name of the vessel was "*Proud Mary*". To our surprise when we asked them our standard question; "*Have ye got any wiskey?*" they said, "Yes"! So we returned the favor with a bit of our 'Apple Pie' drink for the whiskey. The old man took a sip of "*Pie*" and made a huge frown, same with the old woman. Guess they were caught off guard by the

heavy dose of its pure grain alcohol! The daughter-in-law's response was quite different, however, with a slurred "Humm, well now that's pretty good stuff!" When we saw them again later in the day the daughter-in-law wanted the recipe for 'apple pie' saying in her wide eyed grinning country smile, "Well, that sure is good stuff!" She even knew that there was "Hot Damn" in the pie! The crew got a good laugh over this.

The keelboat has a logbook that goes with it wherever it goes. This is the manifest of everyone that participated on the boat for all its excursions. This time Ed had made two columns in the keelboat logbook and asked we write down our inputs in the appropriate place for 'things that worked' and 'things that didn't work'.

About 4 PM we began to look for a place to land for the night for our camp #1. After a muddy failed attempt to get landed at a place perceived to be dry, Chris, with difficulty, climbed back aboard and tried to scrape the mud from his knee. He was exclaiming that what he was going to write in that logbook that we obviously should have a gangplank.



Finally rounding a bend in the river at 4:15 PM, we found an eddy but it barely allowed us to get out of the current. Using the gaff hook my wife, Sharlene, and I had made only the day before beginning this adventure, we were able to grab and hold to the thick tangle of bank vegetation. We tied up the front of the boat to one of the thousands of overhanging tree limbs and exposed roots on the very steep and high muddy riverbanks. I could stand flatfooted on top of the cabin and the top of the bank was just about even with the top of my hat.

The limbs were full of river silt and dirt; the high water line being easily visible all along the river's edge. We tied the stern of the boat up to a larger tree standing in the water's edge. There we spent the first night of our excursion. Only a couple of brave souls were able to get off the boat due to the steepness of the embankment. Daniel Casey says he saw lots of fresh deer tracks and the acorns were still plentiful on the ground. The rest remained aboard and we prepared for the evening meal by setting up the



Bob & Chris in Kitchen



folding tables where the rowing benches had been removed and stacked on the bow. Charcoal braziers were brought out of the cabin and lighted: one for hot water / coffee; the other for cooking supper of ham and cabbage. Bob and Ed prepared the meals on our adventure with great expertise. There was plenty of good food for the five of us as night surrounded us. There was plenty of song and libation to follow with Bob knowing more songs than the rest of the crew. In fact, he generally kept us in song every mile of the trip from Camden to Calion occasionally adding his own words to the music to personalize a piece for the excursion. All being tired from lack of sleep in making preparations for the journey we turned in early. The cabin floor was mostly cleared and bedrolls were spread. Three of us, Chris, Daniel and myself found the hard cabin floor home for the night. Bob and Ed slumbered on the hard rowing deck. None of us guarded the boat during the night feeling confident that the lines were secure and no enemies were likely to pounce upon us.

*Progressed about 12 ½ miles today.*

### **Day 2:**

#### **Sunday, December 19, 2004**

*About 12 ½ miles from Camden*

*7 AM Air temperature 45 degrees, water temperature was 50 degrees*

At daylight we began to consider another day finally arising at nearly 7 AM. The temperature was cool but not freezing. Since the difficulty of finding another landing was evident, the decision was made to stay tied up where we were until after we had breakfast. 200 years earlier, Dunbar and Hunter had followed the military custom of the time of arising and striking camp at once. After about two hours of rowing, poling and cordelling their boat, they would stop and prepare breakfast. Probably the banks were neither as high nor the water as deep as the 9 feet warranted and 12 feet dredged that we have now. It is impossible for us to pole very much as we quickly lose the bottom in the murky depths. Cordelling is equally impossible as the thick brush and trees are entirely too thick to make pulling a rope practical.

The water level was up considerable even after going down 4 or 5 feet and it was still going down about 8 inches per day. We found that we had tied up to a tree that held a "Posted" sign. It had been under water when we tied up and now was fully exposed. Perhaps this should have been a warning sign for what was about to happen for we were about to get a lesson in rivers and wind that we would not soon forget.

At 9:50 AM the front line was cast off and the boat was backed out into the current as the aft line was released. The stiff wind had now shifted directions and was blowing us back into the bank as the current pulled us downstream. Within seconds the oars failed to move us beyond the reach of the tentacles of the trees as spiny ropes of bark, roots and twigs grabbed at every possible catch and we were snagged on the bow rope. This immobilization caused the keelboat to swing as if a pendulum and head directly towards a large over hanging tree that was reaching out over the water, poised to grab anything that came close to its clutches. I frantically plied the tiller to move the 40-foot boat back up stream and away from the snag as Bob and Ed desperately tried to get the nose rope free. The wind and current were too heavy and it partnered up with the snag to

try to swamp the boat by blowing it under the large overhanging tree limb! As we cursed our luck, the keelboat slid sideways toward the tree limb and two of our oars reached out in an attempt to hold it at bay. The boat's mast and lines were instantly tangled in the tree limbs from above and a real chance of the mast breaking was at hand as Dunbar and Hunter, and even as Lewis and Clark, had done. With the wind continuing to push us into the grips of the tree, bending the mast and straining the ropes, I was left with only one alternative. Had the boat tipped enough that the deck had gone under and caught the current we would have surely flipped over. I grabbed my Old Dominion Forge belt axe and scrambled upon the cabin roof as the wind, waves and tree frowned down upon us. The sharp blade of the small axe continued to weaken the 4-inch limb until it snapped under the pressure and fell to the deck below. We were very nearly released when the oars began again and we poled off and away from the grips of the tree. At last the ropes came free of the upper limbs and we pulled out into the safety of the open water with only the current and wind to deal with and no serious damage except to our nerves. We all breathed a sigh of relief but still had to carefully watch the River because we were a toy in the wind. So was the start of the second day. Then our luck proceeded to get worse as the wind had planned more for us later.

Making our way down the river took much attention to keep the keelboat directed correctly and safely. At 10:30 AM and  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile past the 15 mile position we came across the first of several deer camps placed along the river's edge. We had been seeing a few deer along the banks. In another 1 and  $\frac{1}{2}$  miles we passed a place called "*French Port*", or so said one native inhabitant that we talked with as the current carried us past. I noted that we passed marker 316.0 at 1:10 PM but we didn't know where that put us.

Still having a difficult time steering the boat in the wind, I found it impossible to exactly keep track of our position without more experience. Simply marking on the map and noting the time was enough distraction to cause the wind to get the upper hand and send us sliding off course. Taking my eyes off the river long

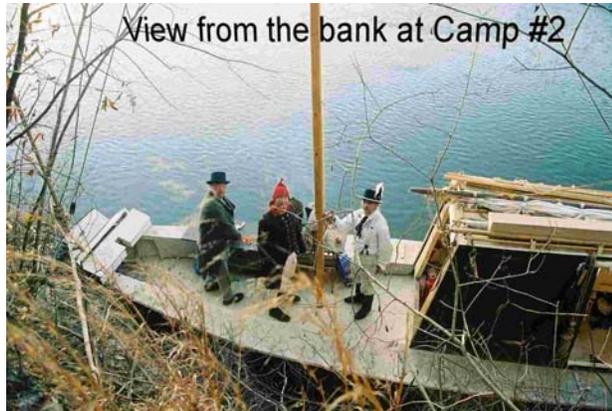


enough to bend over and get a drink of water could quickly send us into the nearest snag! Navigating can be a full time job because once you lose the path it may, and did, take hours to re-locate our position with any degree of certainty. The process must consider the bends in the river ahead and behind while mentally overlaying them on the maps I had printed for the journey. A good part of this day I knew only that we were on the river but not exactly where. Since Mark Thurman had decided at the last minute to decline the adventure he had not returned the modern navigational aid that I had loaned him and we were,

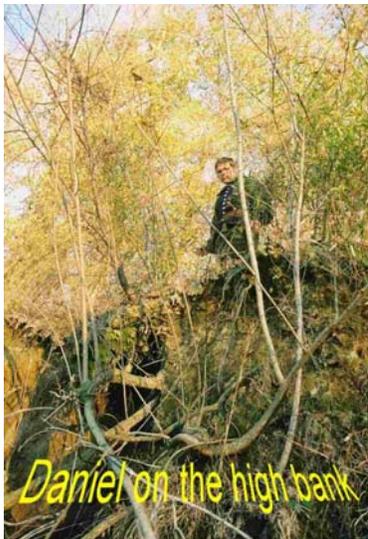
therefore, without actual absolute navigation accuracy. This was an inconvenience that we had not planned on, but like the wind and mud, we had to learn to deal with these things and depend more on the traditional methods which, of course, is part of purpose of making this excursion.

The land surrounding the river was very isolated for the most part with little population and very dense wilderness. Many areas where low banks exist were very muddy from the inundation. Where the banks were high enough to be dry they were very high and covered with so much slit covered bramble and trees as to make exit from the boat very difficult, having no help of a gang plank.

We landed at 4 PM after 6 hours of headwinds. I believe the point we made camp #2 to be shy ½ mile of the 30 mile mark from Camden and on the east bank. Here we found little relief from the current as we found no quiet eddy in which to park the boat. We chose the eastside because the bank reclaimed its normal *“hat high above the cabin roof”* height, or about 12 feet high above the water and therefore was dry on top.



About 300 yards earlier we had just seen a sight we did not expect. A wild hog, of an estimated 125 pounds, oinked or snorted at us from the east bank while following us for at least 100 yards down the low swampy bank that was along that section of the river. We expected to see the feral swine visit us at camp but saw nothing, although sounds were heard by some crewmembers during the brightly moon lighted night. Should we had been starving, either



Daniel or Bob's long guns could have easily taken the meat just as Dunbar and Hunter would have surely done on their expedition. However, we had our hands full already. Had we had a full compliment of crew perhaps we would have been more agreeable to taking the meat.

Access proved only a bit easier with a natural step in the embankment. We were all afforded (and most grateful for) a trip to the top of the dry high bank. The braziers again offered up supper including ham, which seemed appropriate with wild hogs about. This meal, as all meals, was great. We filled our bellies yet found we did not eat as much as we normally do at home when we produce less physical work.

The chilled air and the moon light on the water were indeed beautiful. A bit of music was fun with Chris' fiddle and harmonica, my mandolin and the new clay hand drum. It is an interesting note that all of us on this leg of the adventure are musically talented to various degrees.

As a side note: Ed Williams plays the guitar (although we have no such instrument on this journey) and sings many, many period correct songs. Bob Rogers sings probably even more songs and entertained us for endless hours on this excursion. Chris Bliss plays a variety of stringed instruments including the guitar, mandolin and fiddle as well as the harmonica and sings many songs. Daniel Casey plays the mandolin and fiddle and can sing and play and, although beginning, he has a natural quick learning talent. I am master of none but enjoy playing with the mandolin and have, as friends have told me, experienced enough of the fiddle to understand why it is call the "Devil's instrument"!

The night was quiet and I looked out at 4AM to see the beautiful setting moon over the glass smooth river with the occasional up rooted tree floating past in the chilled crisp air.

*Progressed about 18 miles today after 6 hours making an average of 3 miles per hour. Very near 30 miles from Camden or roughly about half way of our journey.*

### Day 3

#### Monday December 20, 2004

*About ½ mile short of the 30 mile mark below Camden*

*7 AM Air temperature 29 degrees, water temperature 47 degrees, boat cabin 39 degrees*

We were pleased that the temperatures did not drop to the extreme level that had been predicted earlier. 14 degrees would have been difficult to deal with. As it was we had ice in places, like from the splash on the top of the water barrels, but nothing very difficult and once we got the boat moving it seemed not all that cold. By 8:50 AM we departed and headed down the twists and turns of the isolated Ouachita River. The wind joined us again but with even more bluster in our faces. We came to an area called "Miller's Bluff" at 9:30 AM but found no large bluff that we had imagined. It was rather a nice even flat plato-area at N33 degrees 23.860 minutes, W92 degrees 38.139 minutes and 33 miles down from Camden as noted on the map. There is a small fishing camp situated there but hardly a growing concern. Looked like a nice area. Cross Oil loading dock is another ½ mile perhaps. Passed marker 304.9 at 9:53 AM in an additional ½ mile where we were somewhat shielded from the southeastern wind.

At 35 miles from Camden and about 10:45 AM we rounded a starboard or right-hand river bend and headed directly into a heavy wind from the Southeast and lots of things changed quickly. A large fishing village appeared on our port or left side and blowing either foghorn, as I did, produced no curious on-lookers. The village seemed deserted but not abandoned. Our progress was very difficult, even as we faced the wind with four synchronized oars; a person on land could have walked putting one foot in front and touching the first and have out paced us. We struggled for an exhausting 45 minutes to go the 1 1/3 mile past the village only to meet with the true "test of our



*metal*". The wind whipped up the water into maddened whitecaps that spewed cold wet spray in our novice faces. Looming ahead around a port river bend a dark movement through the trees ahead was spied. On the starboard side of the current was a large green navigation buoy marking the channel in a narrower section of the raging river. Exactly at that point a large tree leaned out across the starboard water with outstretched limbs grasping at any and everything that floated by. As we approached the green buoy so did that dark movement coming from around the bend. The first and only barge and tow we saw had just made its appearance! Just why we all had to meet together at that point is a question with no answer, but meet we did. Wanting to give the barge plenty of room we collectively chose to go out of the channel and skirt to the right side of the buoy. The churning barge had slowed so as not to produce a large wake but we could tell little difference from the rough wind-driven whitecaps. Turning to avoid the buoy put us more broadside into the wind and the boat with its cabin became a sail and the wind began to smile. Catching the wind the boat began to slide sideways toward the outstretched claws of the tree as the rear-looking crew unwarily pumped the oars bring the tree closer and closer. As I hollered to reverse the oars my words were snatched by the wind and stolen away. Trying desperately to regain control of the 40-foot keelboat before the tree grabbed us with its tentacles, I pushed the steering tiller to the limit of its material strength to get her heading turned into the blowing wind again. The tiller had been weakened on earlier sojourns down the Arkansas River and we had not taken the time to repair it. Now at about 11:30 AM we were to pay the price of our negligence, perhaps in a terrible way. Just at the point we needed the steering the most, I heard the crack of the tiller and felt the sudden release which threw me stumbling on the deck trying to regain secure footing. I spied the paddle end of the tiller floating away in the current immediately beyond my hopeless reach. The crew up front saw my profound words written in the wind as I loudly cried, *"The tiller's broke give me an oar!"* Scampering beside the cabin I grabbed a spare oar from the roof, thrusting it beside the original broken tiller shaft and into the cold water, I fought madly to regain control. At best, all I could do was to shift the impending crash onto the tree limbs into slow motion. The crew being poked and scratched from many directions again set about stabilizing the boat by holding it at bay with oars and poles finally grasping onto the claw-like limbs up front while I stowed the rowing oar. At that moment we learned exactly what it was like to be truly *"up the creek without a paddle!"*

By some providence Ed had directed another steering tiller be constructed before this trip. He had experimented with it soon after leaving the Camden launching and had decided that, while it had been somewhat constructed to the blueprint specifications; it was not suitable for steering the keelboat due to its long flimsy square shaft and large paddle. That was probably the first item he put in the *"Didn't Work"* column. But unmanageable as it was, we now had no choice but to somehow manage with it! We quickly lassoed the rope grommet around the new tiller and set it in place on the keel riser. With nervous care I forced the boat to turn into the wind as the crew backed us out into the upstream current. The square shank of the massive new tiller bent with every power stroke and refused to easily rotate so it could be feathered for a return stroke causing a

great deal of difficulty. Around the bend, we had made only ¼ mile before we found ourselves crashing into more silt-laden tree limbs on the port side this time. Amidst the limbs tangled in the rigging again, we tied up to wait out the strong winds and consider our alternatives. We simply could not control the boat in this heavy wind with the equipment at hand.

Some time passed before anyone said anything as a helpless defeated feeling overcame us. We continued to cut back the limbs to regain deck space so we could move about a bit. A tray of summer sausage and cheese was passed around in an effort to regain our strength and composure which was whipped down by the wind and River. Ed felt it was appropriate to read an old seaman's prayer as we considered our next move. Then from a simple and direct discussion, based on Ed's prior experience with the tiller, we took a footrest as a straight edge and with the butcher knife scratch marked the tiller paddle. Bob removed with the handsaw about 10 or 12 inches from its length and 5 inches total from its width leaving some of the original taper such that when we were finished the paddle then resembled an arrowhead.



The mast was struck and stowed upon the cabin roof to allow the boat to get past the tangle of overhanging tree limbs. Making ready at about 1 PM, we again pivoted her back into the current but barely getting away as the tiller was pushed backward sticking into the mud nearly breaking it. As her oars untangled from the bramble and finally took hold of the river they propelled her forward out into the

windy current where the modified tiller began to cooperate much better. Soon, having learned a hard lesson, we were headed back into the wind again even with the dangerous flex in the tiller shank.

At 1:44 PM we came across a hunter at "Boone's Mound" who told us that we were only 7 miles from Calion which reassuringly agreed with my calculations. Along the river we had come across other natives that had claimed knowledge of a variety of distances, some of which were accurate and others must have contained errors. During the occasion where we were sheltered from the wind by the trees, the way was made with little difficulty. But then we would eventually round a bend into a stretch of that southeast wind and the white capped waves of river spray were certainly waiting for our exhausted souls. At 41 miles from



Camden we found such a bend with raging waves lying just ahead for us. We stopped at the mouth of the bend at 2:40 PM in a vain effort to wait for the wind to subside and rest for ten minutes. Some of the exhausted crew slept and others checked the gear. Oars in hand again we slid under the Highway 167 river bridge at 3:41 PM where we saw a large snag some distance out in the river with the fresh bones glinting of a deer carcass held in those tentacle clutches. The several turkey vulture buzzards that had been our company the entire journey had found their reward here.

The river finally opened up into a small bay where several homes were seen. The foghorns were once again blown with as much air as I could generate but little activity was apparent in the marina. Bob had a particular interest in making contact here because this is where he had parked his wagon while on the journey. Still the bay was quite. A short distance past the bay at 4:15 PM we turned from the white-capping head wind towards the boat ramps of Calion. Finding the dam gates of the lake opened and water being generally high the landing was a bit tricky. There were places where the rocks were terrible and others where the mud was deep. We finally found more trees to tie up to as we were fairly well trained in this approach by then.

Once landed we immediately began the routine of rearranging the rowing benches and folding tables in preparation of the evening meal. Getting off the boat was to step into the low mud but it had to be done. The crew was to have some changes there and land access was necessary. Bob was leaving the crew and heading back to Fort Worth. Others were coming onboard the next day. Bob took to the road on foot in order to go get his wagon before dark. Returning he said that at a local shop he inquired about where one might procure some "wiskey". Bob was told by the clerk that the county was a dry.

Shortly after supper was begun. A white wagon appeared and it was the same retired country lawyer, Worth Camp, who had seen us off in Camden. He had much good news about the local interest and newspaper reports indicating that he had posted some issues of the article to each of our home addresses. We considered that to be mighty respectable of him to go to all that trouble. He was truly excited about the adventure and asked if there was anything he could do for us to which we, of course said, "got any wiskey?" After a good laugh he departed to acquire some planks to put down on the mud to allow access more easily. We continued to make the boat ready for the night.

Some time later he reappeared but this time another "official" wagon followed him and a bright lantern was shown from it that illuminated a large area. We could see the country lawyer in conversation with a government official who was wearing a shiny badge! It appears that the lawyer was transferring some information to the law for quite a long time. Then we wondered if the country lawyer had actually gone after the "wiskey" and gotten the attention of the dry county law in doing so. We considered going through the mud to talk to the law, but figured that who better to talk to the law than a lawyer? So we did the next best thing, we broke out the fiddle, mandolin and harmonica and sang a strong robust version of Amazing Grace! Ed, Bob and Chris sang while Daniel played the fiddle and I the mandolin. It was a good rendition too! Soon the good

country lawyer brought down some walk boards to cover the slippery mud bank and he came on board carrying a package. For some time the law stayed in his wagon with that bright lantern shining our direction. When we asked if there had been any trouble, the country lawyer said, *“Oh, none at all and here is the contact information for the local law should you need it for any reason during the night.”* The country lawyer continued, *“And here is the ‘wiskey’; that earlier incident with the convenience store clerk was not a case of being a ‘dry county’ but rather a case of ‘bad management!’”* We nearly fell out of the boat with our laughing cheers!

The country lawyer settled in and joined us for a couple of hours while we ate a wonderful supper of potato chowder soup. We were given a great history lesson about the area and especially concerning the Choctaw and other Indian tribes and European contact. You never know where you might learn something new, even sitting on a keelboat in the moonlight on a riverbank in Union County from a retired country lawyer!

Later we passed the evening time with good conversation by the light of our candle lanterns until we could no longer keep our eyes open after a most exciting day.

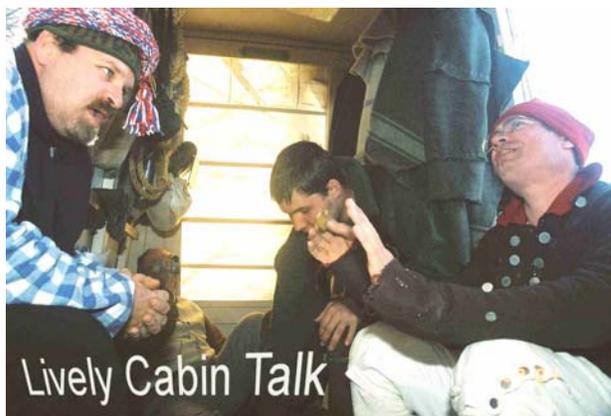
*Progressed about 15 miles today.*

#### Day 4

#### Tuesday December 21, 2004

*45 miles and some 2000 feet below Camden at the Calion Boat Ramps just below the Calion Lake Dam.*

*7 AM Air temperature about 50 degrees, water temperature also 50 degrees*



After a simple breakfast Bob bid his adieu heading back to Fort Worth, Texas, and the keelboat was crewed by four additional members. Michael Bethea of Maumelle, Robert Carrol of Little Rock, Ron Mosley of Jacksonville (who is writing a book on the Saline River) and a young man named Justin Shahan of Jacksonville, making a total crew of 8 for the remainder of the excursion from

Calion to Moro Bay.

Departed Calion at 9:15 AM. Shortly we rounded a bend in the River to the port and we had a northeastern route for about 1½ miles that was very nice with good current. We set the mast at 9:45 AM in preparation for the anticipated passage through the H.K. Thatcher Lock and Dam #8.





Then about 10 AM we followed a starboard turn and headed due southeast directly into the windy whitecaps. Marker 289.0 was passed at 10:10 AM while all four oars were heavily pumping the water. Heading into the throat of the lock we found it jammed up around the open gate with a considerable amount of floating river debris. We steered around what we could to make

our way into and tied up inside the lock. In the lock at 10:50 AM, N33 degrees 18.998', W92 degrees 29.466' we had gone nearly 50 miles from Camden. Lock Master Harold Speers was glad to see us as he remembered descriptions of this adventure from Larry Layne and myself on last year's canoe excursion. The gates soon closed and the water began to fall. During the reconnaissance trip last year the water fell between 8 or 9 feet. This time, due to the flooding, it fell only about 18 inches. Soon the exit gate opened and the horn sounded. At 11:03 AM we waved farewell to Harold and the oars were once again moving the boat downstream. It was with little ceremony considering this is the first time we expect a rowed keelboat has ever gone through this lock.

Still working against the wind, progress was slow. Whitecaps awaited in many bends of the river. The fresh oarsmen Michael, Robert, Ron and Justin, were put to the test and did well through several rowing shifts. For their strength we made the 3 miles from marker 282.0 to 279.0 in the hour beginning at 11:28 AM. Finally rounding enough bends to be mostly shielded from the devil wind, calm water laid before us. Our keelboat glided through the sheltered waters with ease and distinction. Now she could ride the current and make a good 3.8 mph



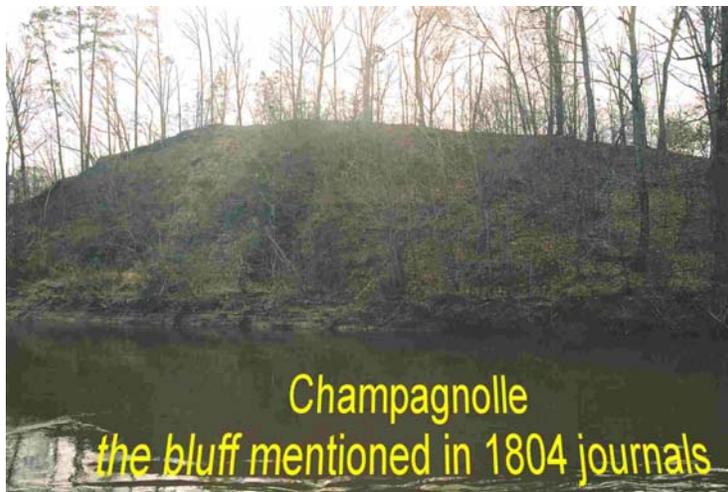
or more like she was designed to do for her hull is nearly

frictionless on the calm water. Of course, it is that same sleek hull design that causes us to be blown around so easily like a leaf on the water.



In the next starboard bend we passed the site where Larry Layne and I camped the year before. It is at a small wet weather creek inlet on the north bank of the dry bluff. We passed by a large hill and a noticeably high bluff at the very next port bend. This bluff, called Champagnolle, had been mentioned in the Hunter and Dunbar journals 200 years earlier. Surely, it looked very much the same to them as it did to us now. We paused for a moment to recognize the significance of what we were seeing before us.

As the river was run and the banks passed us by, the marks of civilization became more apparent. Some contact was made with local people along the way. One man in a river boat stayed with us for maybe an hour as he talked about the river. The question we were regularly asked was, "What y'all doing?" To which we answered with our own stock question, "Got any whiskey and how far it is to Nawlins?" It seemed the appropriate reply to their question besides, "what good's a pilgrim if'n you can't skin'em?"



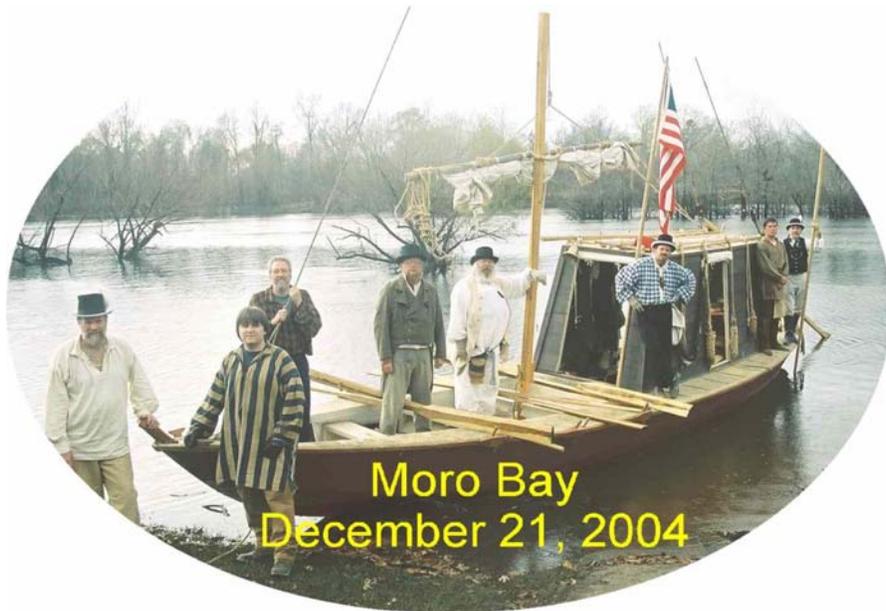
At three miles from our destination of Moro Bay a small odd looking barge appeared to be coming straight to us. Eventually meeting, we found ourselves in a most enjoyable conversation with Dennis Allen, the Moro Bay Ranger. He had come to welcome us to the landing upon hearing of our nearness. Near marker 277.0 we began to

pass many fishing camps and homes along the way, some simple and some very elaborate. We suspected that one expensive dock must surely belong to the Governor but the Ranger said that the dock belonged to a beer distributor and even the Governor didn't have that kind of money! We got a chuckle over that.

Past a half sunken barge and several more docks of every sort, at 2:09 PM we found ourselves just less than two miles from the Moro Bay dock. At 2:30 PM we stopped long enough to get everything shipshape and presentable. Soon all six oars were plying the last ½ mile of water as the keelboat proudly entered the sound and made her joyous landing! What a sight we must have been!

*Landed at 2:45 PM we had progressed about 15 miles today. We had been on the Ouachita River for a total of 73 hours and 45 minutes or four days and three nights and covered 60 miles and 3583 feet ending near N33 degrees 18.002 minutes, West 92 degrees 21.014 minutes.*

With the weather turning wintry with every minute we were disappointed, but understanding, when so few people came out to see our historic landing. The wind picked up and became cold as we tried to get the keelboat upon her wagon so she could be hauled back to her home in Scott, Arkansas. Cold rain began to sprinkle down on us and the struggle continued. Michael and Robert and the rest tried repeatedly to get the boat lined up on the trailer as Ed backed it deeper into the cold water. When asked why the ramp was so shallow when we had expected a much steeper place to get the wagon under the keelboat, the Ranger chuckled and said the ramp was indeed steep but that it was 100 feet out in the water. He said they were flooded and we were actually loading in the parking lot and not to the ramp at all! Somehow, few of us saw the humor until a little later as we fought the wind, current and now the shallow water to get the boat finally loaded and out of the water. The cold sprinkles of rain had become steadier while we unloaded the gear out of the boat and loaded up our own wagons for our journey homeward. No time was lost in packing as the horses were ready to leave. A slight detour to get Michael and Robert to their own wagon and soon we bid farewell to our companions on this adventure and began the long dreary wet ride home barely escaping by several hours the on-coming snow and ice.



Feeling like both journeys were successful in their own light, many things were discovered on this 2004 expedition just as in 1804. However, the things we discovered were more about the experience and the process of getting from one place to another than it was about the geology, biology, sociology and climate of the area that Dunbar and Hunter were so very interested in. Having only maps that they made themselves and no idea exactly what they expected to see and learn, Dunbar and Hunter's team, with the handful of soldiers, completed the first scientific expedition into the land called the Louisiana Purchase. They did this while Lewis and Clark and the "*Corps of Discovery*" were still on the trail. We had the good fortune to have excellent maps and a working knowledge of the area. Therefore, we avoided many of the hardships they endured picking and choosing our obstacles somewhat. The keelboat didn't even leak or take on water. We had it easy. Many of the things we learned like how to handle the boat and how to adapt to the changing river and wind, the Dunbar Hunter team had known even before they started their expedition of 1804. But learn we did and a good deal too! As arduous as our four days were we can now, a little more accurately, imagine how unbelievably resolute and enduring those stout folks of 200 years ago really were. We had all read about them and tried to imagine what it was like and we dreamed about doing those things ourselves. As we get older the dreams will be harder to separate from the memories, but somehow, I think this excursion will be burned in our memories forever!



A great *Thanks!* is given to a good many people who were, to varying degrees, involved in the effort to celebrate and recognize the Dunbar – Hunter Expedition through this historic excursion down this Arkansas Ouachita River. From the beginning of this Keelboat Project, people from all walks of life have joined together with the grand attitude that this was something that was worthwhile doing. There seemed to be no question that this project would get completed as work continued over 18 months. People donated everything from materials, talent and knowledge, equipment, thoughts, advice and time to actual money. Most workers suffered some cuts and bruises, frustrations and confusions, satisfactions and disappointments but in unity accomplished the task of assembling a representation of a late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century keelboat such that was used on the rivers all around to stir the development of a growing nation. This was no small task and the pride of accomplishment belongs to everyone who supported the project in any and every way, not just the several who did the work. Even members of the Early Arkansas Reenactors Association who never have even seen the boat and yet have contributed some of their membership dues to the project, have every right to feel proud. The kind of pride that supports living history as it can now present keelboat programs and demonstrations to schools, museums, parks and the general public. It is what makes this hobby exciting! Thank you for helping to make this happen!