SCREE (Sesquicentennial Colorado River Exploring Expedition)
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Introduction/Abstract
The SCREE project was initiated by Pat Kikut and Tom Minckley as a river journey down the Colorado River not to re-enact John Wesley Powell's original expedition, but rather to re-envision future proactive river management strategies.

Biographical Note: Pat Kikut
Pat Kikut was raised in a small beach town in Southern California. He left in 1987, earned a BFA from the University of Colorado then went on to earn his MFA from the University of Montana. Currently he is living in Laramie, painting, and teaching at the University of Wyoming. Themes in his work often come from extensive highway travel. Kikut states: "Traveling allows me access into compelling landscapes, stories, and cultures. These things help me gain an understanding of the West and drives the work I produce in the studio." Kikut's work is included in the collections of The El Paso Art Museum, The Missoula Art Museum, and The University of Wyoming.

Biographical Note: Thomas Minckley
Tom Minckley is a senior professor at the University of Wyoming. Trained as a biologist and ecologist, he has degrees as follows: a Ph.D., University of Oregon, Eugene, 2003; M.A., University of Oregon, Eugene, 1999; B.S., University of Arizona, Tucson, 1996; and, a B.S., University of Northern Arizona, 1987. His regional focus is the water-stressed western North America. His projects are aligned with the conservation issues of the West, the capacity of the ecosystems of the West to support the stresses of land-use change and growing populations, and the resources they need. His perspective comes from the study of the long-term history of ecosystems, spanning thousands of years. His interest is how plant communities respond to environmental stress, like drought and fire, stresses that can affect biodiversity and might ultimately cause ecosystems to reorganize into new, novel plant associations or ecosystems. He primarily studies arid and semi-arid ecosystems, which may be vulnerable to changes in water availability. His hope is that, if we can understand how ecosystems have responded to disturbance in the past, we might be able to better manage these natural resources in the future.

Scope and Content
The SCREE project was initiated by Pat Kikut and Tom Minckley as a river running journey down the Colorado River that involved more than 60 artists, writers, scientists and a film crew, as well as additional support crew personnel. The trip took 70 days of floating and more than 1000 miles of rowing, as well as 80 days of filming. The purpose was not to re-enact the past expedition, but rather to re-envision a "...future that engages traditional, historic, and contemporary river ecosystem perspectives to derive proactive management strategies, integrating community values, science, and humanities through an analysis of culture, informed management, and traditional ecological knowledge."

The project website defines the project as follows:
"On May 24th, 1869, the ten men of the Colorado River Exploring Expedition stood at the banks of the Green River in Wyoming prepared to enter into a region of the United States known only as "unexplored territory." The expedition was to enter into the "Great Unknown," take scientific measurements, chart the region, and effectively complete our nation's maps.

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To John Wesley Powell, unexplored territory was unacceptable, and unknowns were opportunities for greater understanding. Powell and his crew traveled over 900 miles from Green River, Wyoming to the mouth of the Virgin River, in present day Lake Mead, through a wild, largely uninhabited system of river canyons. The West was a new and final frontier, ripe for development and lacking only a system for the manipulation of the Colorado River's water, a subject Powell addressed in his "Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States".

By erasing empty space and, in turn, leaving only defined place, Powell's journey fueled a western migration that continues today. The unexplored territory of 1869 through which the Colorado River Exploring Expedition was the first to travel in a continuous, deliberate progression continues to be explored by adventurous boatmen and boatwomen. Powell's unknown has become a highly visited, studied, and managed environment encompassing five states, two U.S. Forest Service units, three Bureau of Land Management field offices, three U.S. Bureau of Reclamation reservoirs, two U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refuges, and five Nation Park Service units.

The Colorado River Basin also continues to support indigenous groups in five Native American reservations. In many ways, experiences similar to those of the Colorado River Exploring Expedition are available through the stewardship of public land management agencies. However, our perception of place and the resulting relationship to the environment of the arid West are easily distinguished from Powell's time. The Colorado River Exploring Expedition embarked from Green River, Wyoming armed with "two sextants, four chronometers, a number of barometers, thermometers, compasses, and other instruments" (Powell 1875, pg. 8) and began a process of complete geographic, geologic, and topographic surveys of the American West.

The linear progression of the systematic and methodological utilization of water resources— a process commenced by Powell's surveys of the arid region of the United States—has led to a contemporary Great Unknown, one in which we have inherited a system of management built upon incomplete scientific knowledge and techniques better applied in more humid regions. This system has begun to show weaknesses and has forced reactive management as pressures increase from climatic uncertainties, increased populations, compact obligations for water allocations, and most recently a move to privatize 640 million acres of public lands.

Today, nearly 150 years after Powell, a methodological lineage exists between his systematic inquiry into the unexplored territory of the arid West and the complex plumbing of the modern Colorado River system that supports over 40 million Americans through storage reservoirs, irrigation, and trans-basin diversions. The 150th anniversary of the Colorado River Exploring Expedition offers an opportunity to once again begin a systematic and deliberate expedition into the unexplored territory of Western economies, politics, and ideologies as they relate to the water resources of the Colorado River Basin.

Powell was able to travel through a continuous, natural riparian ecosystem. This experience is no longer possible, as the system is now separated into two basins, with three major dams, 15 management areas, and over 20 significant laws governing the allocation of Colorado River water. Because of these major differences, this expedition is not a reenactment of the past, but rather a re-envisioning of our future that engages traditional, historic, and contemporary river ecosystem perspectives to derive proactive management strategies, integrating community values, science, and humanities through an analysis of culture, informed management, and traditional ecological knowledge."

Materials include notebooks, watercolor sketches, photographs, maps, permits, printed ephemera, and logistical materials.

This archive is currently in process.

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