

Pass It On®...

An Impossible Journey.

How John Wesley Powell navigated the Colorado River and Grand Canyon in wooden boats.

In May 1869, John Wesley Powell, a former Union Army major who had lost most of his right arm in the Battle of Shiloh, led 10 explorers in launching four heavy wooden boats loaded to the gunwales with 10 months of supplies.

Three of the boats were made of oak, more suitable for cruising lakes than busting through rapids. None of the men were experienced boatmen. The one-armed captain of the crew had maps with gaps in them. Still, it was the grandest expedition since Lewis and Clark. Over 500 rapids and 1,000 miles of unknown currents awaited them.

We all do the best we can to prepare for what life throws at us, and adapt when we fail. Though Powell had boats custom-made for the journey, they were heavy. He recruited men who knew how to survive in the wilderness but had never navigated a river. He packed so much food it nearly sank the boats from the start. He hastily added two crew members just days before launch, planning on hunting game to augment their rations. In hindsight, he should have failed, swallowed up in the rapids, dead of exposure or starvation. Instead, he began in Green River, Wyoming, traversed the length of Utah, cut across the top of Arizona and staggered ashore at the mouth of the Virgin River in Nevada.

Much of the journey was spent repairing boats damaged while portaging around rapids and carving new oars out of driftwood. Food was lost or spoiled, game was scarce, and Powell went inland to negotiate with the Indians for food. The expedition spent days in freezing water and 115-degree heat. Three men deserted the cause along the way. The crew slept on boulders and pulled on wet clothing the next morning. And most of the time, they had no idea what lay ahead. But at the end of the arduous journey, they had successfully adapted to the challenges and mapped a wilderness previously labeled as “territory unknown.” As the West expanded, Powell’s maps would be invaluable.

As we go through the turbulence in our lives, we too often focus on obstacles rather than finding

ways to adapt and appreciate the journey. None of us is fully prepared for what lies ahead. Yet with a little ingenuity, we can make it even when others quit. And along the way, we can find time to look up and see the grandeur that is life. Even amid all the difficulties, there were times between the thundering rapids when John Wesley Powell was enraptured by the beauty of his surroundings: We glide hour after hour ... as our attention is arrested by some new wonder.

Beauty is in the living of life, in looking beyond the challenges to the wonder of the small moments we achieve—sometimes against all odds.

Perseverance... PassItOn.com

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