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Padding down the Colorado River to surface its secrets

Will Stauffer-Norris and Zak Podmore traveled 1,700 miles to assess the state of the beautiful but threatened Colorado River.

By Molly Driscoll, *Contributor* / February 9, 2012



Will Stauffer-Norris (blue kayak) and Zak Podmore (red kayak) took four months to traverse 1,700 miles of the Colorado River to bring attention to its condition. The southern end in Mexico, they found, had dried up altogether.

Courtesy of the Colorado College State of the Rockies Project

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The schedule: Get up at first light. Wait for the sleeping bags to dry out from the dew. Paddle or float down the Colorado River until dark. Try to find a beach on which to camp out – not always an easy task, with some of the land along the river being privately owned. Read and write at night. Go to sleep and start over again the next day.

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Will Stauffer-Norris and Zak Podmore followed this plan for 110 days for their Source to Sea project, a collaboration with the State of the Rockies Project. The State of the Rockies, which was created by Colorado College in Colorado Springs, Colo., studies issues that are facing the Rocky Mountain region.

Mr. Stauffer-Norris, who is from Blacksburg, Va., and Mr. Podmore, who is from Glenwood Springs, Colo., came up with the idea of kayaking down the entire Colorado River, starting in the Wind River Range in Wyoming and ending in Mexico's Sea of Cortez. The aim was to study the state of the river and how it will impact Americans in decades to come.

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Both men graduated from Colorado College last May. Both have been on the water since childhood, kayaking and participating in other activities.

Stauffer-Norris in particular had wanted to do a longer-than-usual water voyage. “I just kind of wanted to see what would happen if you

extended the trip over the entire river, being away from civilization,” he says.

When they mentioned the trip to a professor at Colorado College, he suggested they link it to the State of the Rockies Project, in which individuals work together to gather data about problems faced by the Rocky Mountain region and bring the problems to the public’s attention. The project for the 2011-2012 school year was to focus on the Colorado River Basin, an area of study that dovetailed with Stauffer-Norris and Podmore’s Source to Sea project.

One of the ideas they most want to impress upon people about the Colorado River, Stauffer-Norris says, is that the river is, in fact, a single body of water – a fact people often forget. “A lot of people don’t think of the river as a whole,” he says.

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