



GARY BROWN
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BOAT RIDE WITH A RATTLESNAKE

One warm Saturday in July, Medicine Bow warden Joe Gilbert and I decided to take the jet boat down the North Platte River to Seminoe Reservoir and check fisherman. We made it to the lake with no trouble, checked some fisherman and had lunch. As usual, the wind came up and we had to make a run for the river and back to the landing.

At the mouth of the river we saw some fishermen and stopped to check them. Joe went down to the fishermen while I stayed with the boat. Joe finished checking the fishermen and as he returned to the boat he stopped suddenly and yelled, "Snake". At about the same time I saw a rattlesnake leave the bank and get in the water, five or six yards from the boat.

Immediately after entering the water, the snake turned and headed for the boat. I figured the snake would turn and head back to shore. It didn't take long for me to realize that the snake felt differently and had made up its mind it wanted a boat ride.

Almost as quickly, I made up my mind that I wasn't going to let him in the boat and drew my pistol. I didn't see any problem shooting the snake as it was getting closer all the time and beginning to look as big as a python. Besides, cowboys on TV shoot the heads off snakes all the time.

As the snake's head approached the side of the boat, I took aim and started to squeeze the trigger. My concentration was broken by Joe's frantic scream, "Don't shoot! You'll sink the boat." Somehow Joe's screams soaked in and made some sense, especially since my aim was not as good as the cowboys' and I undoubtedly would empty my gun and the snake would still be in the boat. I wasn't sure that the administration would buy the story that I sunk a \$10,000 boat trying to keep a python or whatever from attacking me. I did the next best thing and abandoned ship.

During my scramble for the shore, Joe and I lost track of our scaly friend. This left us with the unpleasant task of trying to locate the snake. Joe reasoned that since it was my boat, it was my responsibility to make sure it was safe for passengers, namely him. Joe assured me he would be there to back me up.

After some more discussion, I got back in the boat armed with an oar. I very carefully looked everywhere I thought a snake could hide; no luck. Joe still wasn't satisfied and suggested I take the boat out for a spin and see if I could shake the wily reptile loose. This sounded like a good idea and I gave it a try; still no luck. I pulled back into shore and explained to Joe the snake must have gotten to the bank during my scramble. Joe wasn't totally convinced, but he didn't want to be left forty miles from his truck with a man-eating snake so he got on board.

Joe remained a little nervous and continued to look over his shoulder. About a mile up the river, Joe tapped me lightly on the shoulder and said, "There he is." This caused everything to come to an immediate halt again.

The snake was between the motor and the transom. All that could be seen was his tongue flicking in and out and his two beady black eyes that didn't look overly happy. We tried to shake him loose with some sharp turns. The snake still liked riding better than swimming. While I beached the boat, Joe guarded my back. Upon reaching shore we finally were able to subdue the snake. During that terrible fracas, Joe broke my oar. It turned out the snake wasn't quite as big as a python, measuring only 40 inches. No doubt I would have sunk my boat trying to shoot something that small.

CAN I RENT YOUR KID?

On a Saturday in June, I was checking fishermen on Granite Reservoir west of Cheyenne. It was hard to make cases on this lake because it was so open and they could see you coming. I stopped farther back from the lake and watched with my spotting scope.

I found one fisherman sitting by two poles. I watched as he reeled both outfits in and cast them back out. I drove down to where the subject was fishing and got out. After checking his license, I asked about the second pole. He told me the pole belonged to his son who was playing up the hill. I told him what I had observed and that I would give him the benefit of the doubt if his son returned by the time I finished checking the other fishermen down the shore.

As I went one way along the beach he went the other. I thought this was a little strange since he had just told me this kid was playing on the hill. When I finished with the other fishermen, he was sitting by his poles again. I asked where his son was and he told me he couldn't find him. I was having severe doubts about the story, but said I'd give him a little longer and went the other way down the beach.

The second group of fishermen I checked commented that the fisherman sitting down the beach was sure strange. I asked what they meant. They explained the man had walked down and asked if he could rent one of their boys for a little while. I had to chuckle and explained what was going on. They all had a laugh. I walked back up to my fisherman and asked if he'd had any luck renting a kid. He got a sick look on his face and said, "I thought it was worth a try. I figured it would be cheaper than a ticket." I had to agree and laughed the whole time I wrote the citation.