

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, August 13, 2018

Colorado and Its Rivers: The rivers of America are rich in history and have many stories to tell. Colorado is not known for its navigable rivers and did not depend on river traffic for its growth. Nonetheless, three of the nation's 10 longest rivers rise in Colorado and flow through several states and cities to the sea or their junction with a still-longer waterway. Navigation on these rivers, unlike the Mississippi-Missouri system, was minimal, however.

The Rio Grande, 4th longest in the nation, rises just east of the continental divide near Silverton, Colorado, and flows generally southward and southeastward 1885 miles to the Gulf of Mexico, forming the U.S.-Mexican border from El Paso, Texas, to its mouth at Brownsville. Principal cities include Alamosa (CO), Albuquerque (NM), Las Cruces (NM), El Paso TX)-Ciudad Juarez (Mexico), Del Rio (TX), and Laredo (TX-Mexico).

The Arkansas River, 6th longest in the U.S., rises near Leadville, Colorado, and flows south, then east 1,469 miles through the Royal Gorge, Canon City, Pueblo, and La Junta in Colorado, Dodge City (KS), Tulsa, (OK), and Little Rock (AR), before joining the Mississippi River north of Vicksburg (MS). From the Mississippi, steamboats can get as far upstream as Little Rock. In 1982, Bob Reilly and I broke down with our Model 87 just west of Holly, Colorado, between Lamar (CO, and Garden City (KS). Being towed into Holly, Bob and I worked on the car while local boys fished in the sleepy Arkansas River nearby.

The Colorado River, 7th longest in the country rises in Grand Lake on the western slope of the Front Range of the Rockies at the edge of Rocky Mountain National Park. It flows generally southwestward 1450 miles through Glenwood Springs (CO), Grand Junction (CO), the Grand Canyon (AZ), Lake Meade and Hoover Dam (AZ), and then forms the border between Arizona and California to Yuma (AZ), before flowing into the Gulf of California just south of the U.S.-Mexican border.

Finally, the South Platte River rises in South Park, southwest of Denver, and flows 439 miles through Denver, Fort Morgan (CO), and Ogallala (NE), to its junction with the North Platte at North Platte, Nebraska.

The Pecos River, 926 miles long, ALMOST rises in Colorado, but actually begins in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of northern New Mexico, and flows southward through Santa Rosa, Fort Sumner, and Carlsbad, New Mexico, and Pecos, Texas, to its junction with the Rio Grande near Langtry, Texas. It passed about 5 miles east of Roswell, New Mexico, where I was stationed in 1944, and it was no more than a dry ditch except in the springtime.