

INFLATABLE RAFT "GEORGIE"

Grand Canyon Boats

Grand Canyon National Park

Grand Canyon Village

Coconino County

Arizona

HAER AZ-82

HAER AZ-82

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

1849 C Street NW

Washington, DC 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

INFLATABLE RAFT “GEORGIE”

HAER No. AZ-82

Location:	Grand Canyon National Park, Grand Canyon vicinity, Coconino County, Arizona Inflatable Raft “Georgie” is located at 36.050189, longitude: -112.132891. The point represents the building housing the Grand Canyon National Park Museum Collection. It was obtained from Google Earth on April 22, 2021, and there is no restriction on its release to the public.
Date of Construction:	Prior to 1950s
Manufacturer:	Unknown
Original Owner:	Georgie White
Present Owner:	National Park Service
Significance:	Inflatable Raft “Georgie” is significant for its association with Georgie White, the first woman to operate a commercial rafting enterprise in the Grand Canyon. She revolutionized the business by utilizing inflatable rafts she lashed together, known as a “G-rig”, allowing adventurers to run the rapids instead of portaging.
Description:	This inflatable ten-person neoprene raft named “Georgie” is just over 15' long. ¹ At the time of the documentation, it had been semi-inflated with Styrofoam beads to provide structural support for conservation reasons. The raft is painted silver with “Woman of the River” and “Georgie” painted in red letters on each side. The body of the raft is comprised of an irregular, oval-shaped tube with three inflatable thwarts running perpendicular. Each thwart had a valve while a single valve was used to fill the remainder of the raft with air. The raft also features a block on a sheet of rubber that was glued on the sides of the boats to serve as oar locks. In November 1992, the valve on the main tube was cleaned, and a hole was patched on the bottom front thwart. The original perimeter rope was replaced with a ³ / ₈ " triple twist nylon one.
History:	Born in 1910 as Bessie DeRoss, Georgie married Harold Clark while still in high school and moved across the country, from Oklahoma, to New York, to California. She later divorced him in 1936 and married James

¹ Inflatable Raft “Georgie” has been accessioned as Catalog Number 13670.

White. After the tragic death in 1944 of her 15-year-old daughter, and only child, Sommona Rose due to a drunk driver, Georgie appears to have found solace on the Colorado River. Her friend and fellow Sierra Club member Harry Aleson invited her on a hike to the Colorado River in 1944, followed by floats down in the river wearing only life jackets in 1945 and 1946.

In 1947, Georgie White purchased an Army surplus seven-person raft for use on river runs and established “Georgie’s Royal River Rats.” These inflatable rafts were readily available at military surplus stores after World War II. By lashing together three ten-person rafts, known as G-rigs (with the G standing for Georgie) starting in 1954, Georgie could bring more tourists to the canyon. The motorized rafts also allowed her to run the rapids rather than having to portage, as was common practice. She was quoted as saying, “the difference between me and the men was I plowed through the rapids while the guys carried their boats around the rough water.”

Life magazine described her in 1961 as an “iron-nerved mermaid” and contemporary accounts and videos provide insight into the experience of a trip with her “Royal River Rats.” Famous for wearing a leopard leotard and subsisting primarily on tomatoes, cheese, and Coors beer, she employed Los Angeles firefighters as guides. Travelers could expect spartan conditions and dining from cans of food rather than a cooked meal. But the price was right: \$300 for twelve days. This affordability increased tourism in the canyon. Over her forty-five year career, Georgie’s business alone brought 12,000 visitors. She was also viewed as somewhat reckless and was known for being rude to customers. At the end of the trip, Georgie performed an initiation that included hitting her customers with an oar, dumping water on them, and then giving them brandy and a pin designating them as “Royal River Rats.” She died of cancer at the age of 81 in 1992. The 24-Mile Rapid was officially renamed “Georgie Rapid” in her honor in 2001.²

² Biographical Note for Georgie Clark Collection, Northern Arizona University, available at http://azarchivesonline.org/xtf/view?query=navajo&docId=ead%2Fnaui%2Fclark_georgie.xml&chunk.id=0, accessed April 2021; Megan Michelson, “The Rabbleroising Queen of Grand Canyon Rafting,” May 24, 2018, available on the *Outside* website at <https://www.outsideonline.com/2301371/rabbleroising>, accessed April 2021; “Adventure on a Great River,” *Life* (August 4, 1961), 55, 58-60; “Federal Geographic Names Board Oks ‘Georgie Rapid,’” October 24, 2001, *Williams-Grand Canyon News*, <https://www.williamsnews.com/news/2001/oct/24/federal-geographic-namesbrboard-oks-georgie-rapid/>, accessed April 2021; and Tom Martin, “Chapter 11 1952 Georgie Raft,” video, available online at <https://vimeo.com/492287448>, accessed April 2021. There is a biography of Georgie White by Richard E. Westwood entitled *Woman of the River: Georgie White Clark, White-Water Pioneer* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997). This video provides some insight into a trip with Georgie: “Georgie White Clark, 1977,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHICWGEjkTs>, accessed April 2021.

When White donated the raft to Grand Canyon National Park, park staff were initially hesitant to display it for fear it would look like they were endorsing White’s rafting business. According to correspondence in the accession folder, Georgie offered to bring a can of neoprene paint and cover the lettering. The boat was on display on the Visitor Center courtyard from 1960 until December 2003. Western Archeological and Conservation Center (WACC) conservator Brynn Bender helped move the boat to the Science Center Warehouse in June 2004 for conservation as part of the “Save Our Boats” historic boat conservation project. From October 2008 to December 2013, the raft was housed in the Maintenance Warehouse. The Grand Canyon historic boats—including Inflatable Raft “Georgie”—were moved one more time to a new storage area in the Powell Building in December 2013.

Sources:

The report is based on information from the Grand Canyon Museum Collection and the following additional sources.

“Adventure on a Great River.” *Life*. August 4, 1961.

Biographical Note. Georgie Clark Collection, Northern Arizona University. Available at, http://azarchivesonline.org/xtf/view?query=navajo&docId=ead%2Fnau%2Fclark_georgie.xml&chunk.id=0, accessed April 2021.

“Georgie White Clark, 1977.” YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHICWGEjkTs>, accessed April 2021.

Martin, Tom. “Chapter 11 1952 Georgie Raft.” Available online on Vimeo, <https://vimeo.com/492287448>, accessed April 2021.

Michelson, Megan. “The Rabbleroising Queen of Grand Canyon Rafting.” May 2018. *Outside* website at <https://www.outsideonline.com/2301371/rabbleroiser>, accessed April 2021.

Project

Information:

Inflatable Raft “Georgie” was documented as part of the Historic American Engineering Record’s Maritime Recording Program. The Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) is part of Heritage Documentation Programs, a division of the National Park Service. Todd Croteau, HAER Architect, served as project manager. Ryan Pierce produced the measured drawings in 2012. Grand Canyon National Park staff provided the information for the historical report, which was formatted by Justine Christianson, HAER Historian, in 2021.

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Photos taken in the storage warehouse.

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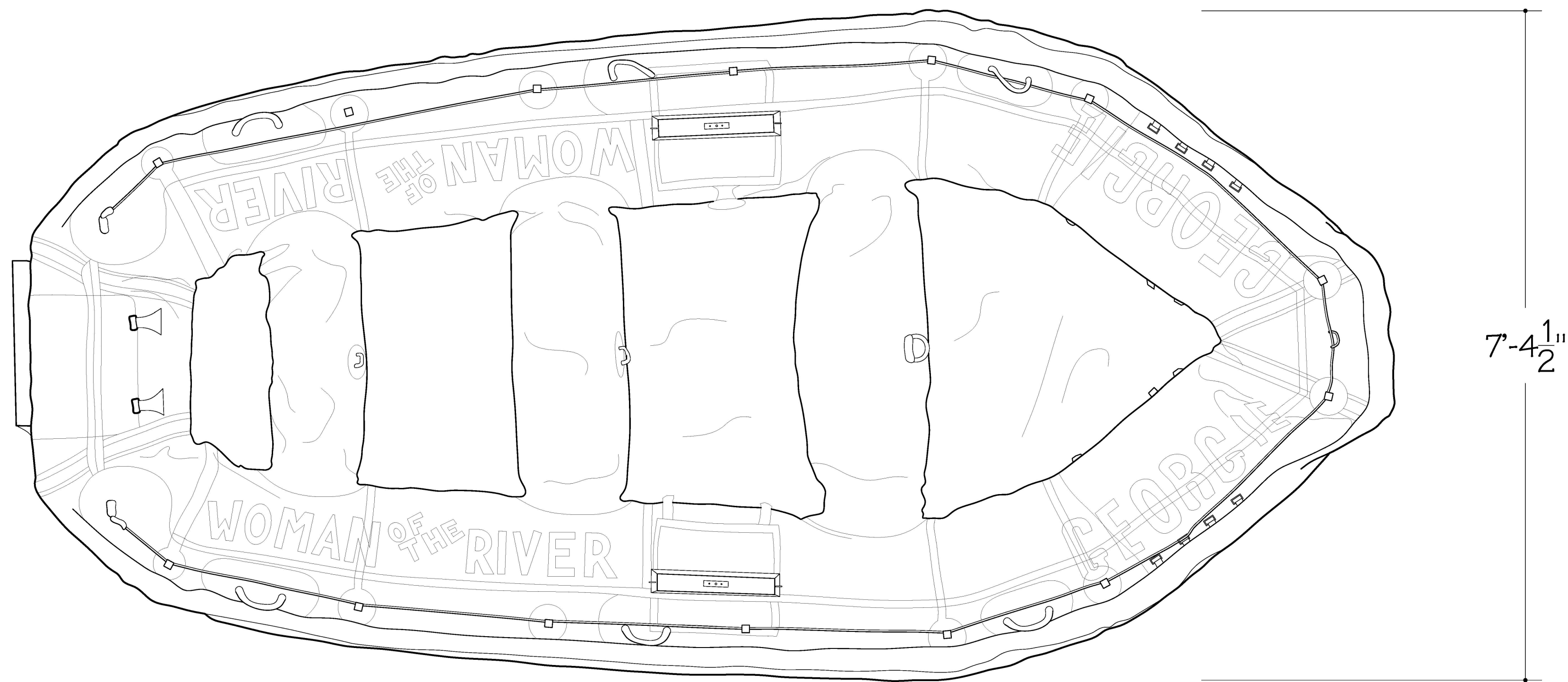
Michael C Quinn, photographer, 2012

AZ-82-1	3/4 view from the bow looking aft along the port side showing the name.
AZ-82-2	3/4 view from the stern looking forward along the port side.
AZ-82-3	Starboard side view.
AZ-82-4	Port side view.
AZ-82-5	3/4 view detail at the port bow showing the rowing station and the name.
AZ-82-6	Straight view from the stern looking forward.

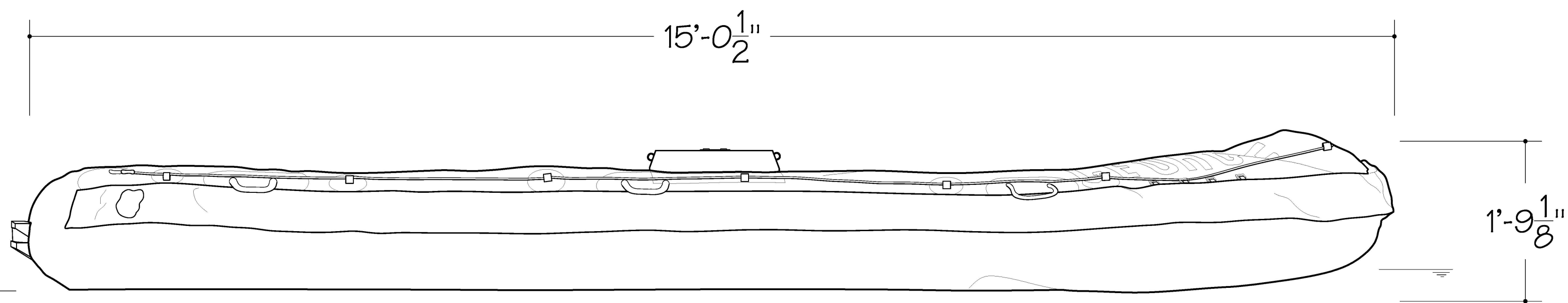
Inflatable Raft *Georgie*

Colorado River Boat

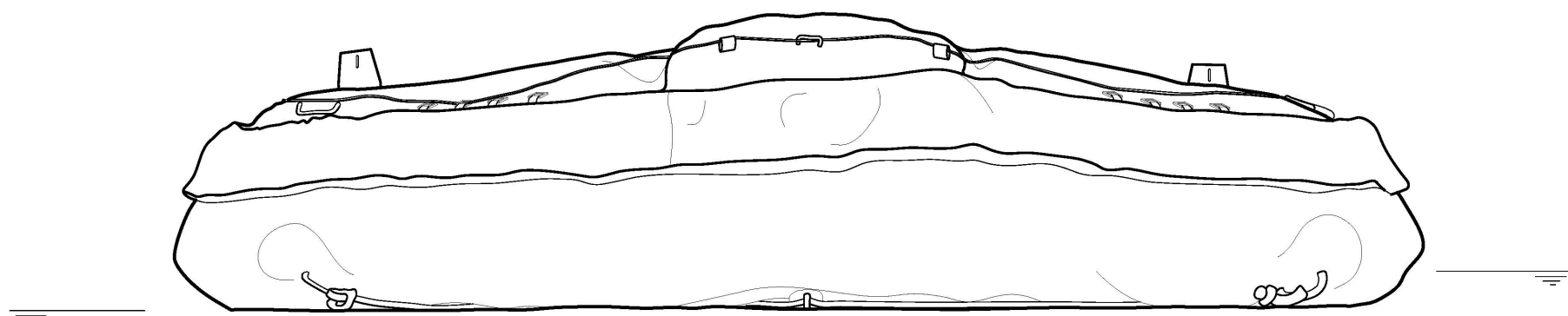
Plan/Elevations



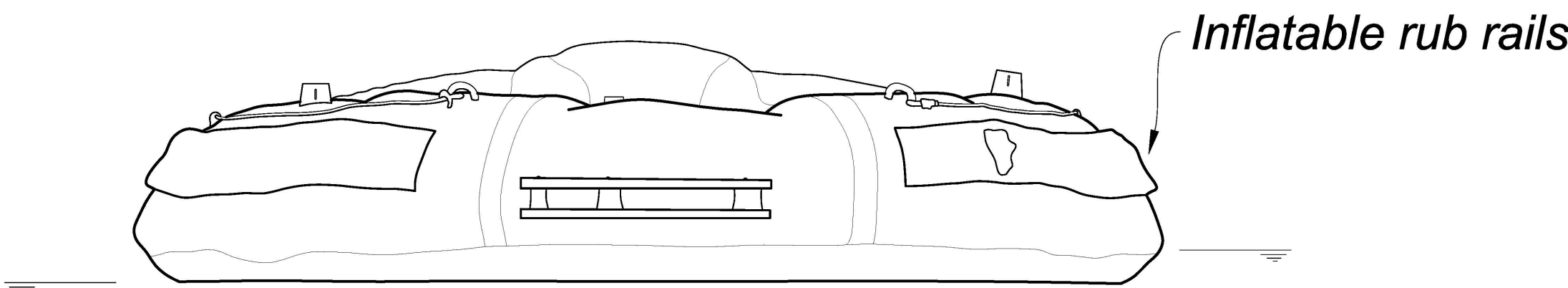
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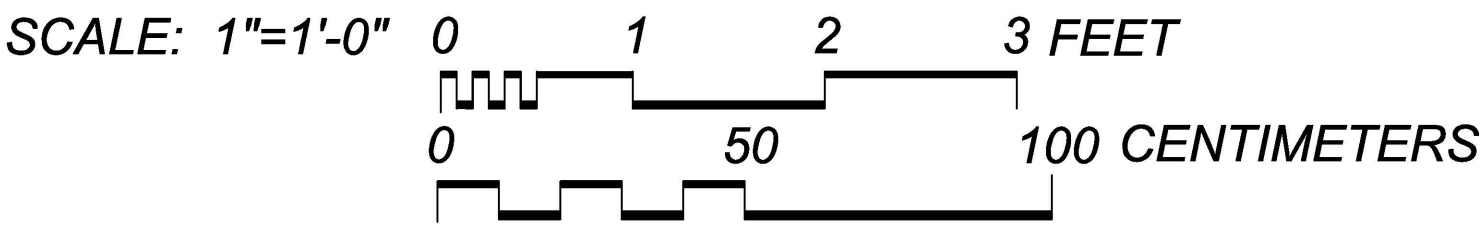
Starboard Elevation



Bow Elevation



Stern Elevation

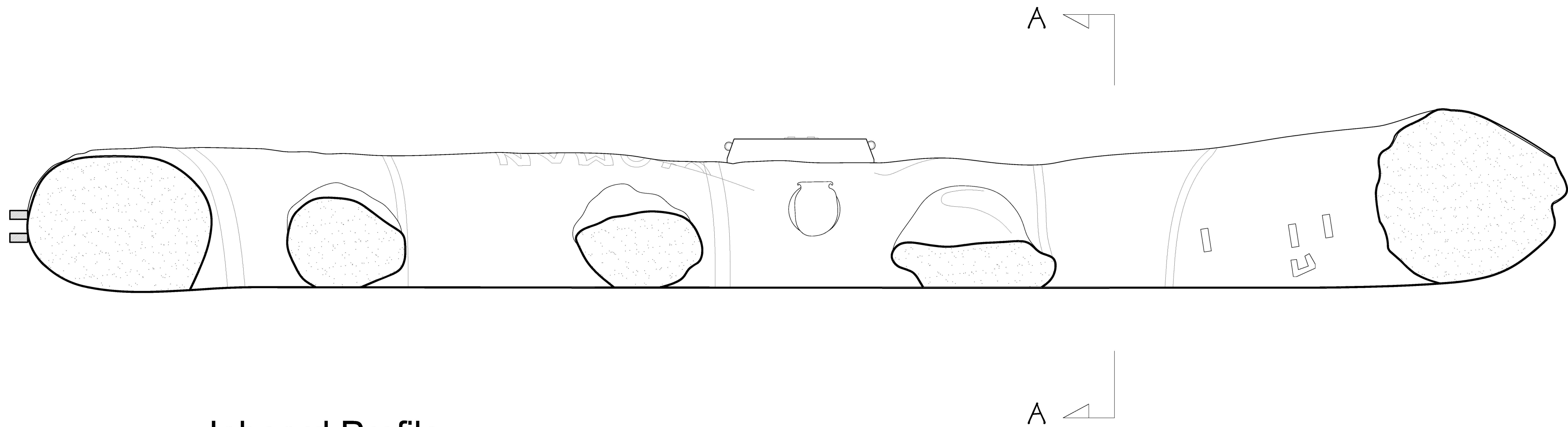


Note: The raft was semi-inflated using styrofoam beads to provide structural support for conservation. When fully inflated with air the chambers would have fuller dimensions. Drawings depict existing conditions.

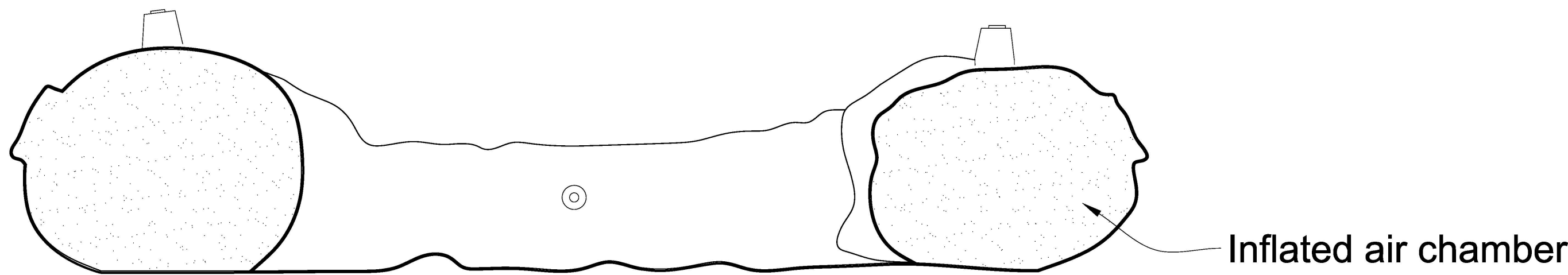
Inflatable Raft *Georgie*

Colorado River Boat

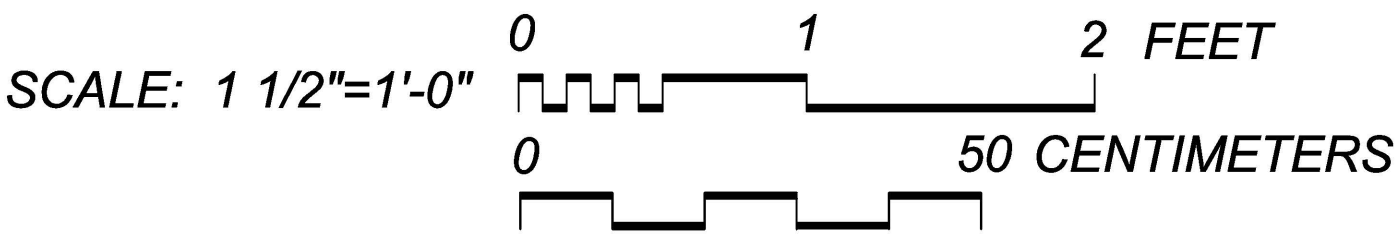
Inboard Profile/Section



Inboard Profile



Section A-A

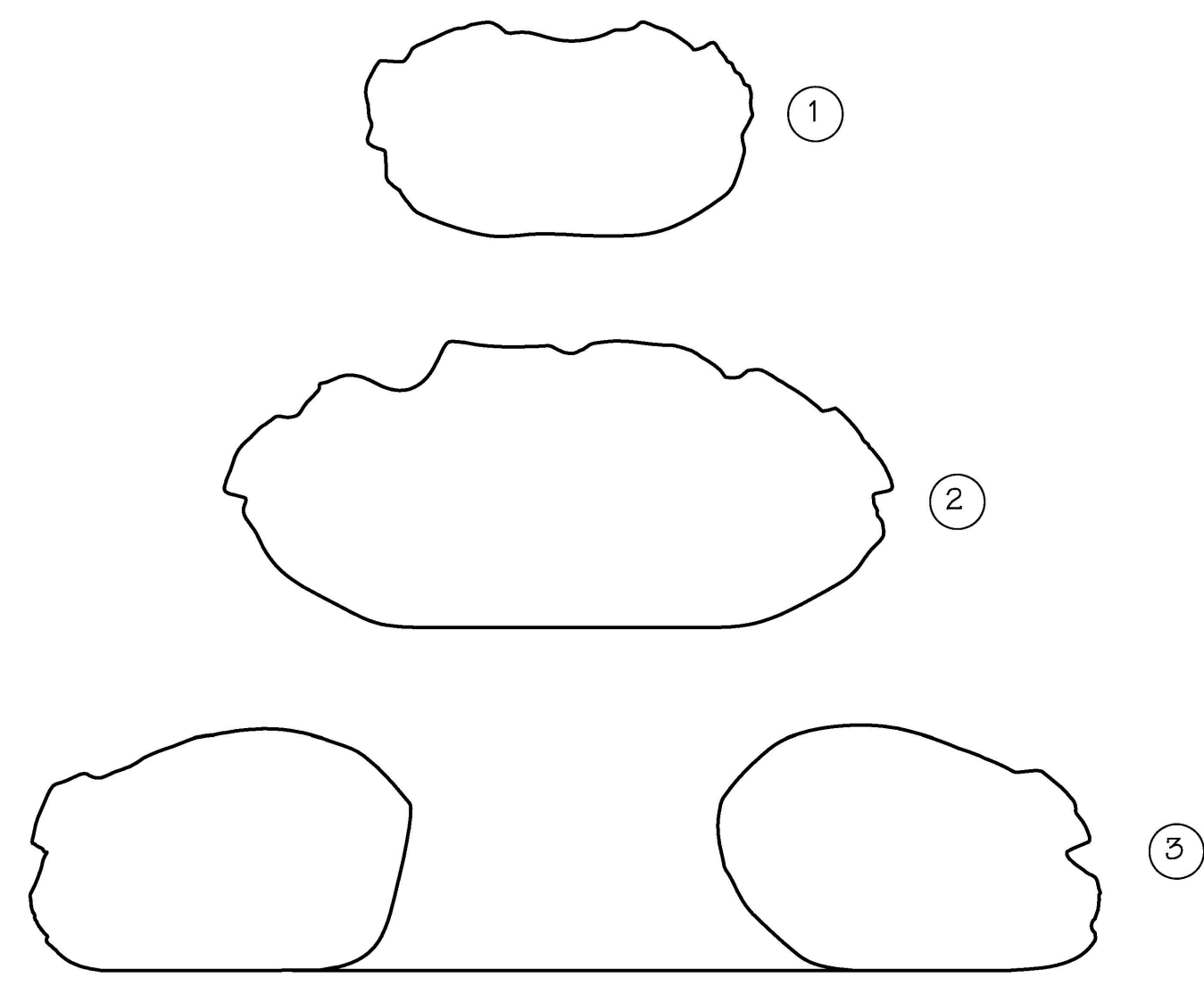


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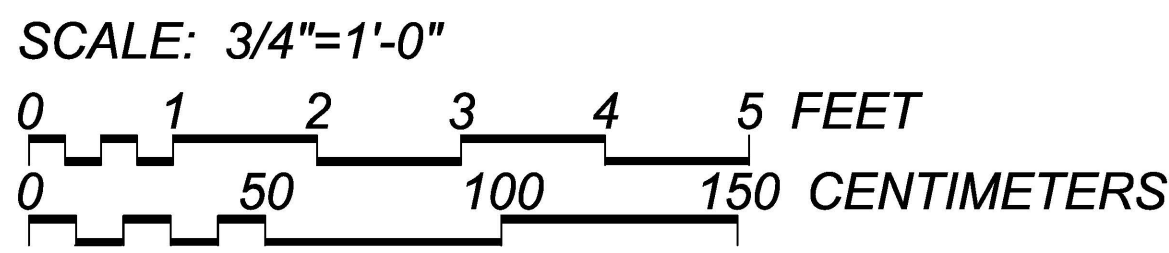
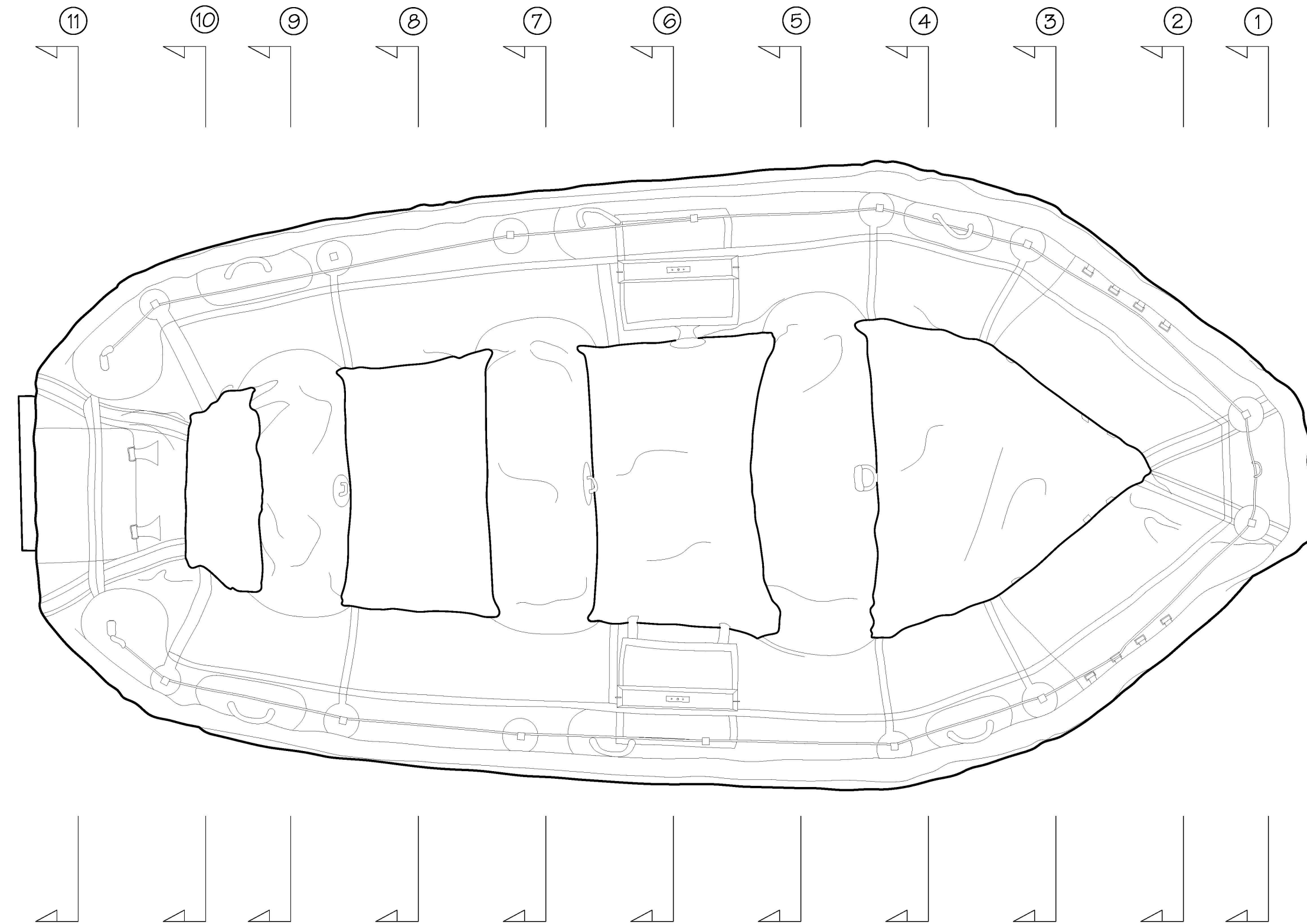
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Colorado River Boat

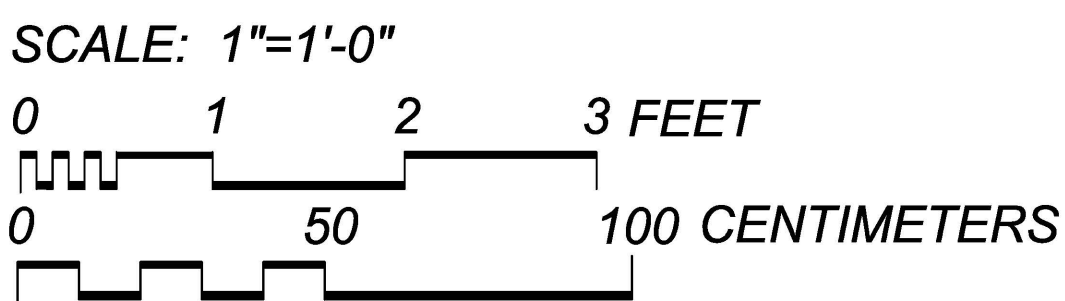
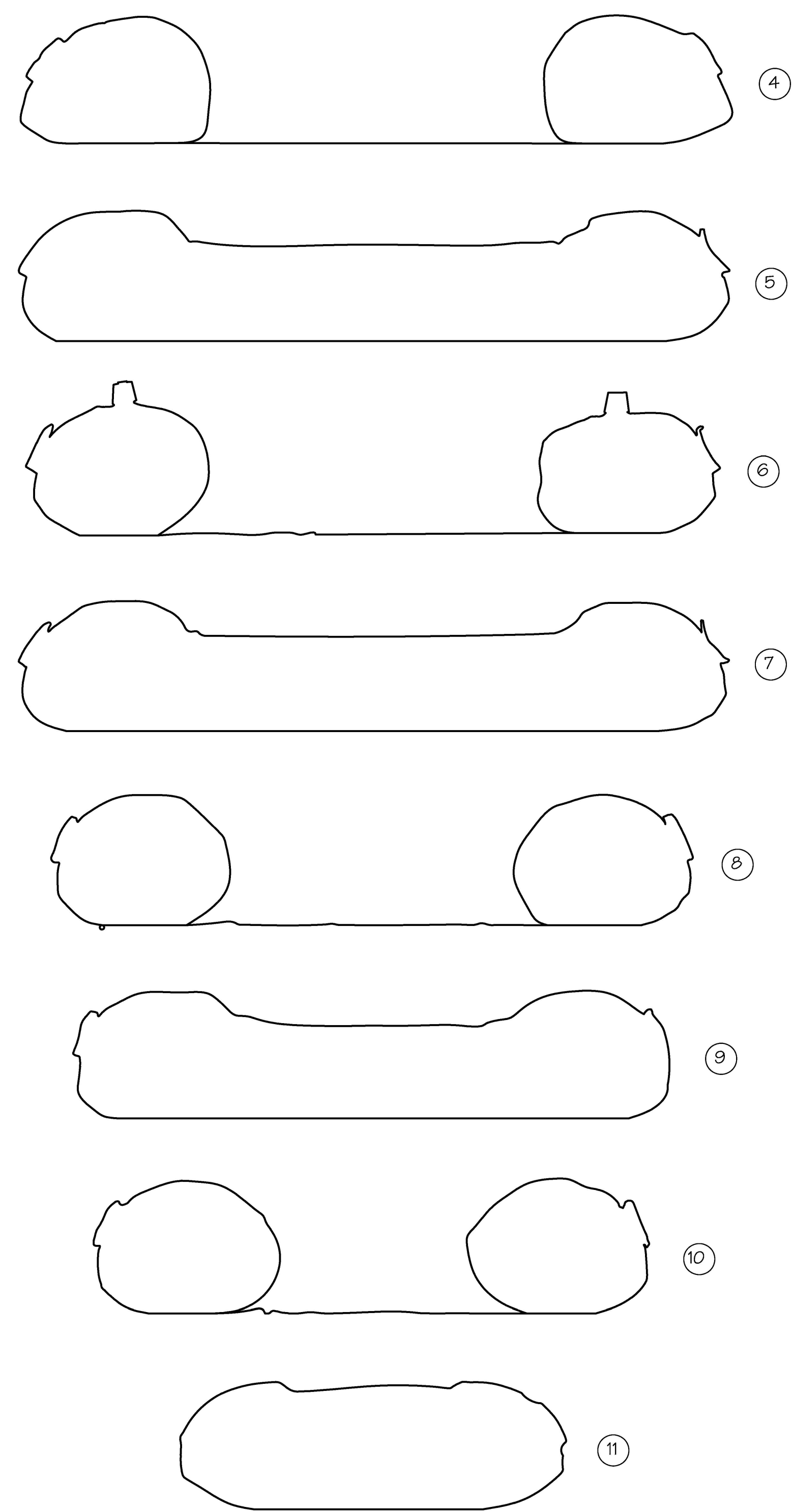
Sections



SCALE: 1"=1'-0"



NOTE: THE RAFT WAS SEMI-INFLATED USING STYROFOAM BEADS TO PROVIDE STRUCTURAL SUPPORT FOR CONSERVATION. WHEN FULLY INFLATED WITH AIR THE CHAMBERS WOULD HAVE FULLER DIMENSIONS. DRAWINGS DEPICT EXISTING CONDITIONS.



DELINEATED BY: JEREMY MAURO, 2012

HAER MARITIME
RECORDING PROGRAM
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

GRAND CANYON VICINITY

INFLATABLE RAFT "GEORGIE"
GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK
COCONINO COUNTY

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