

A Record Year for the FIBArk Downriver? By Ed Loeffel

I'm checking the flow in the Arkansas River in Salida, every morning, watching it climb 3 to 4 hundred cfs every day for the past six days. This morning it peaked at about 3500 cfs. The countdown on the FIBArk home page shows 6 days until the event starts. There is 200% of normal snow pack in the upper drainage of the Arkansas, and the weather this year is resulting in a late runoff. There is a good chance that we will see 5000 cfs in the river this year on Sunday, June 19th, for FIBArk's annual 26 mile Downriver Marathon.

According to the June 20, 1995 Mountain Mail the record for this race was set in 1995 by Nelson Oldham from Aspen, Colorado, who paddled from Salida to Cotopaxi in 1 hour 47 minutes and 18 seconds. The flow was reported as "upwards of 5000 cfs". Nelson's time gives an average speed of over 15 mph: very fast for a human powered boat over a 26 mile course. This was almost a 5% improvement since the previous record of 1:52:36 set by Gary Lacy in 1983. Several paddlers finished better than Lacy's 1983 record including second and third place paddlers and Andy Cora and Mike Freeburn who finished in 1:47:57 and 1:48:50, respectively.

This could be the year that water levels may be conducive to a new record. FIBArk will host the USA Wildwater National Championships this year bringing the best Wildwater paddlers to Salida. That combination should put Nelson's record in jeopardy.

Check the event tab on the FIBArk website, www.fibark.net for updates or changes that may be necessary for high flows. You can follow the flow in the Arkansas at http://www.dwr.state.co.us/SurfaceWater/data/detail_graph.aspx?ID=ARKSALCO&MTYPE=DISCHRG.



F Street bridge in downtown Salida at 4400 cfs.
Photo courtesy of the Arkansas Headwaters Recreationn Area