



WATERLINES



Newsletter of Poudre Paddlers

November, 2009

Canoeing the Dream: Grand Canyon at Last

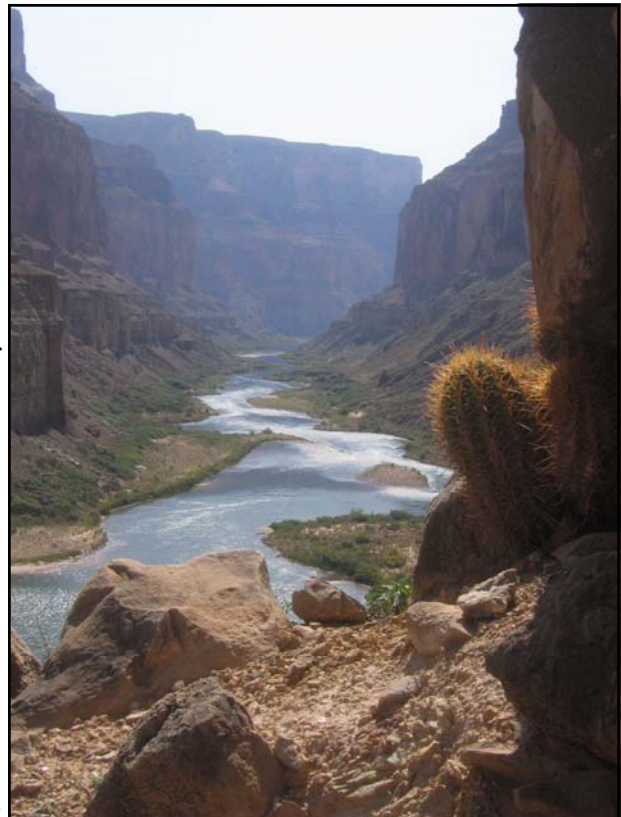
By Eric Hermann

A memory and a dream: Some 30 years ago, I stood on the South Rim with wife Connie and son Eric, and seeing a far-off glint of river, wondered what it could possibly be like down there. Years later, as a paddler, I dreamed of this. Now, among 14 other, more experienced men and women in seven rafts and two, sometimes three, kayaks, I am the oddball in a 10-foot Esquif Detonator Canoe.

Friends Karen Roth, Mark Klug, Joe Schmid and Katie Christensen have conspired to invite me, knowing how much I've wanted this. They and the others on Mark's permit helped make that dream come true. Sadly, our most experienced river-runner, John Fischer, has dropped out at the put-in. He felt head-achy and disoriented—and too risky for a wilderness journey. Doctors later diagnosed a brain hemorrhage. He said to keep his raft, dividing its rowing among us, and all his food and supplies. But we missed him already.

The First Rapid, Badger Creek, mile seven, class 5, is not too big by Grand standards. "A jaunt," I thought, but no: This was big, by my standards, all leaping waves and so amazingly fast. Its entry

(Continued on page 10)



Nankoweep Section by Eric Hermann

In This Issue:

Prez Letter, p 2

Stillwater Canyon, p 3

Pin on the North Platte, p 8

Kinnikinnik Unplugged, p 14

Ruby Horsethief, p 17

Canoe Quotes, p 19

From the Prez....

'Twas a great season—lots of water just about everywhere—and I floated my share: five multiday trips (North Platte, White, Chama, Yampa and San Juan -- all first time runs), Poudre's North Fork (another first, almost epic), several lakes, and innumerable Poudre runs. Hope your season went well.



As you may know, the club sponsors weekly whitewater runs in Poudre Canyon. These are well-attended, regularly drawing 8 or more participants. It was not unusual to see nonmembers show up -- either as a guest of a member, or by virtue of the website calendar or word of mouth. It also was not unusual for kayaks to outnumber open boats (a shift in club boatographics?). The 'Night on the Poudre' tradition continues to be the strongest whitewater draw for our club and a very effective recruiting tool.

This year we wanted to start a similar tradition for flatwater, with a series of weekly outings on nearby lakes. While we did not establish critical mass for these events -- getting to the point where participation is high and reliable enough for the events to run themselves -- it was nonetheless a start. Weather may have been a factor keeping participation down, as well as perhaps the time (weekday evenings) and cost (habitat stamps, entrance fees).

Next year we will run the flatwater program again. We believe there is a need out there. Is there? Did you want to participate but could not? What prevented you from doing so? Help us refine the program make it more accommodating. The benefits of success of this effort -- if anything akin to the whitewater case -- would be enormous to you, your fellow boaters and the club.

Next year as the season gets underway we plan to sponsor a 'paddle days', a community event introducing boating to the public. Think 'learning to paddle' meets 'demo days' meets 'swap meet'. More on that soon.

I am grateful to the work the officers put in this past year (Roger, Eric, Steve, Mike, Randy, Mary, Debbie H, Debbie A) -- this organization would not run without them. Special thanks also to Chuck and Regina Connelly for their contributions.

Prior to our annual meeting in April will be an officer planning meeting around February to organize the upcoming year. Any member is welcome to participate. If you would like to have a say in the direction of the club, consider attending.

So for me, in the meantime, I'll be working on my latest acquisition, an Ocoee, getting it ready for roll sessions. By the way, I am looking for a length of flexible tubing for my hand pump, 1 1/4 inner diameter -- been to three places already with no luck. Any ideas?

Stillwater Canyon on the Green

By John Conaway

Yep, that water in that canyon sure is still!

At daybreak on the final day of our trip the weather is getting ugly. The wind is picking up, and gusts throw waves of sand in our faces and threaten to send the canoes tumbling down the shore.

We're busy trying to break camp at Spanish Bottom, a few miles below the Confluence of the Green and Colorado Rivers and just above

the first rapids of Cataract Canyon, one of the most challenging whitewater runs in the U.S. when the river's up. We, on the other hand, have just finished one of the easiest and most beautiful river runs anywhere but, because of the change in weather, we're looking forward to getting out of here even if that means enduring a rough and noisy jetboat ride. The biggest challenge we've faced on this entire trip is to get our gear packed this morning for that ride.

Some of us are scarfing down ginger candy hoping to ward off possible motion sickness on the boat. Our shuttle is due at 11 a.m., but yesterday we saw another outfitter pick up their passengers several hours late, so we aren't concerned about being ready on time. Oops! A few minutes before 11, the jetboat comes into sight around the bend. Good grief! The thing is huge, with a footprint that



looks as big as a Greyhound bus, much bigger than the shuttle boat we saw yesterday. How do they get that thing up this little river? As it turns out, they do it competently, smoothly, and surprisingly quietly, providing a delightful ride through a gloriously beautiful canyon of the Colorado River we wouldn't have seen otherwise. Score!

Many Southwestern canoeists just never seem to get around to paddling the Stillwater Canyon of the Green River. This is the stretch below the more commonly paddled Labyrinth Canyon section. Stillwater extends to the confluence of the Green and the Colorado. The biggest deterrent is probably the jetboat shuttle back up the Colorado to Moab, with its attendant cost and presumed hassle. Surprisingly, the jetboat, far from being noisy and depressing, was an enjoyable highlight. While not exactly cheap, we

agreed the outfitters earned their fee by working hard and providing hassle-free service.

We arranged our shuttles through Tex's Riverways (hereafter TR) in Moab. There is at least one other outfitter, Tag-A-Long Expeditions, that provides a similar service and are probably fine folks too. Arranging the trip by phone was simple. TR's jetboat can carry more than twenty people and at least ten canoes (the Tag-A-Long boat we saw on the river was smaller) so on any given run

group. Camping is first-come-first-served with a rather weird exception we'll mention below. By the way, portable toilets are mandatory and if you bring your own, make sure it's an approved type. Ditto with fire pans. The website, <http://www.us-parks.com/canyonlands-national-park/river-regulations.html> will link you to requirements.

We arrived in the TR parking lot in Moab, Utah, at 8 a.m. Our cars would remain there until we returned. After loading TR's van, we were off to the launch at Mineral Bottom, a 39-mile drive, much of it on dirt roads.



Dennis Nimetz shows Suzanne Phelan the river direction. by Mike Phelan

If you haven't been to Mineral Bottom, the highlight of that drive is the section near the river where the dirt road switchbacks down a very, very high cliff, an experience that acrophobes hate, because the cliff is very, very high. Trust us. If you're acrophobic, you'll hate this. Someone has posted a video on YouTube of this part of the drive. It doesn't have state-of-the-art production values, but you'll get the gist: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCsL2-1Yq8Q>.

At the launch a Canyonlands National Park Ranger asked for our trip "leader" by name based on the copy of our permit he had in hand. The ranger, a pleasant, quiet fellow, checked required gear, finding us short two spare pfd's, which our driver provided gratis, which helped make this hassle-free.

Loading and launching were tricky, with room only for one canoe at a time at the bottom of a steep clay bank. This is common on the Green on both the Labyrinth

(Continued on page 5)

they are likely to be carrying several groups (mark your gear!). They were open for our dates, October 7 – 11. We reserved our space with \$50 each, the balance payable by launch day. Cost per person was about \$160; solo canoeists pay about \$20 more. TR also rents toilets, boats, fire pans, and many other things if you need them.

TR told us how to get a permit from Canyonlands National Park, which is automatically granted for this stretch and \$20 a

(Continued from page 4)

and Stillwater sections—really ugly access to launch and camp sites, demanding a bucket brigade to unload and reload.

Four days of pretty much idyllic weather and canyon scenery followed, and, well...Still Water. The current is so slow that if you don't paddle, your progress is likely to be determined by the wind as much as the water movement. In our case, amazingly, the idyllic conditions extended to the wind as well—only light breezes, as likely to blow on our backs as in our faces, even well into the afternoon. Whoever heard of that on a Southwestern river run?

One less-than-idyllic element was that the early part is flanked by the White Rim Trail, a rugged dirt road that runs through Canyonlands for vehicles and backcountry camping near the river. It is also used by bicyclists, usually accompanied by a vehicle or two carrying camping gear. While we heard vehicle noises from time to time, it turned out not to be a big problem for us.

More than making up for that small gray cloud over our trip was enjoying a beaver, whom we shall call "B," swimming leisurely near shore. The next morning one of us, whom we shall call "John," or "J" for convenience, was the first one up. Staggering through the sand to the "kitchen" to start water for "coffee," he spotted B coming out of the underbrush from the left, about 40 feet away. B stopped. J stopped. Their eyes met. B started walking again and, with a fine sense of irony, passed now within two feet of the tent of the wildlife biologist in our party who was peacefully sleeping. J started walking. B stopped. J stopped. Their eyes met. Now they were 20 feet apart. B started walking again and this time J stood watching while B crossed in front of him and entered



Deb Hinde, Mary Peck lurk in tamarisks
By Mike Phelan

the shallow water, stood up and turned to face him. Then, standing upright in shallow water and now ignoring J, B calmly reached down into the water with his – or her – let's call it her – right forepaw, then brushed her fur in the area below her left "arm." B repeated this with her left forepaw, dipping into the water and then brushing her right side. B repeated this ritual once more on both sides. Then B turned, settled into the water, and swam a leisurely loop back to where she'd started, stood up and looked around, still with no eye contact with J; and then, in no seeming hurry, settled into the water and began swimming down the length of the island and out of sight, following the same route as the evening before. We recommend that campsite.

Each day we found ourselves launching mid-morning, paddling easily about six hours with a couple breaks, to camp. Although you're allowed to camp anywhere along the river

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

here, good camps are not plentiful. For example, we paddled several hours below Mineral Bottom before we noticed the first reasonable site. It's a good idea to start looking for camps early.

We thought four days plus the pickup day—five days, 50 miles—was adequate. However, had we been pinned down by weather on day three or especially day four, or had we been faced with strong up-canyon winds, we would have been sorry we hadn't allowed one more day. On the other hand, bear in mind we probably weren't the most energetic group ever to paddle those waters. Now cometh the Confluence with the Colorado, a bit of an anticlimax some of us thought. Maybe we were expecting giant



whirlpools or something, or at least a rainbow, but what we got was the same beautiful canyon scenery we'd been enjoying all along, with twice as much water. Anyway, the jetboat will pick you up anywhere from the Confluence down to Spanish Bottom, four miles down river. If you go too far, the first rapids are reportedly easy class two in

the autumn. Then they get harder. Plus you need a different permit for that section, with a lot more restrictions. At high water, Cataract Canyon is world-class whitewater.

Just below the Confluence there's a big sign on river left warning of the upcoming rapids and directing paddlers to stop and register there for camp sites at Spanish Bottom. At this point on our trip, Alice entered Bureaucratic Wonderland:

1. You are required to sign up for a campsite and you are supposed to camp in that site.
2. Signing up for a campsite is a preference not a reservation.
3. Campsites are listed by name at the register but without a map or description.
4. The names are not helpful in identifying the sites because...
5. ...no signs identify them by name or even as campsites.
6. The people already camped in what you think is "your" site are as confused as you are.
7. Even the outfitters don't seem to understand the system.

How do we reconcile this chaos with the sublime competence exhibited by the ranger at the put-in? One theory put forward is that this sign-up system is part of some kind of psychological study, with Federal agents hiding in the bushes mak-

(Continued on page 7)

ing notes about the ensuing interactions among disparate groups of people, some of them perhaps foreigners, many tired and cranky at the end of the day, some perhaps inebriated to various degrees, some trying to do the right thing and some not giving a damn, but all having differing opinions about how the heck the system works.

In any event, when we got to what we thought was the site we had signed up for, somebody was already camped there. They told us they thought somebody was camped in their site but they weren't sure (how could they be?). They made it clear we were welcome but maybe not entirely (who can blame them?) We dithered for a few minutes and then moved on to a silty beach down the river just above the first rapids in Cataract Canyon, which turned out to be a fine site.

When the jetboat arrived at 11 the next morning, our group, being camped the farthest down-river, was first to load. One of us asked where in the boat to sit in order to minimize the chances of motion sickness. The captain seemed genuinely puzzled by the question, saying it had never "come up" before. We passed the gear to the crew of two on board, then the canoes, which they stowed on racks overhead. This part of the process seemed destined for disaster, with the gusting wind grabbing the canoes and the two crew members tripping along the narrow metal gunwales in flip-flops (and, of course, clothes), but there were no problems. We climbed on board and then we were off to pick up the next group of passengers.

The boat felt like it was running on rails and the powerful twin engine-driven pumps that propel it (60 gallons of water jet from the steerable nozzles each second) were well-muffled, making it easy to talk. The trip up to Moab, running at something under 20 mph, took a couple of hours, with a potty

stop in the middle. We'd been warned that the jetboat ride would be very cold and to wear all our warm clothes, but on this day that wasn't necessary. Nobody felt the least queasy.

The Colorado River Canyon we jetboated through was arguably even more spectacular than Stillwater Canyon, and some of us thought we might look into paddling this run next time in spite of the motorized traffic. Politely, the driver brought our boat to a standstill whenever we encountered any other boat, motorized or not, letting them pass by in calm water.

When we disembarked at port, the jetboat, with gear and canoes on board, was gunned up onto a big trailer to be hauled back to TR headquarters while we were shuttled by van. Our vehicles, which had been stored in a locked compound while we were on the river, were waiting for us in the parking lot, ready to load. The TR employees helped shuttle the gear and canoes off the jetboat and helped us sort out and dispose of the trash and recyclables, providing good service to the end.

Our group's summary opinion of this trip: all thumbs enthusiastically waving in the air. We'd be happy to make this run again, and next time we'll be looking forward to the jetboat part. If we can, we'll allow at least one more day for side hikes and/or bad weather; some of us think two more days would be optimum, planning to arrive at Spanish Bottom with a day to spare for hiking, particularly to the Doll's House, a striking group of spires above the canyon wall on river right. Of course, we'll try to camp on B's Island again if we can find it, hoping for another performance.

A Pin on the North Platte

By Will Golson

The last of three days along the Six Mile Canyon run on the North Platte began sunny with a few wispy clouds, air temperature just about suitable for river running in T-shirts and shorts, the river a choppy class II. Debbie and I were the last boat to launch that morning, a couple of minutes behind in rigging. But then there was the ensuing fruitless five minute search for my favorite water bottle, a longtime companion I did not want to leave behind.

When we did finally launch without the bottle, we were alone. But it was a spectacular morning. The water was easy, yet busy and engaging, the sun melting away last remnants of morning coolness. Helmets optional. Some miles downstream, a boat ramp and campground awaited, our planned rendezvous point with the group.

In the meantime, the river was ours. I do so love the wilderness isolation – it just feels right: working with my partner, navigating the river's spanse, staying with the current, avoiding the obstacles – one of those 'yes-this-is-why-I-do-this' moments.

After a half hour or so, the river swung to the northeast, directly into the sun. Sunlight bouncing and reflecting off the water, all was bright, glaring—river features becoming indistinguishable. White-water noise picking up, sounds like a rock garden with pour-overs. Into the garden, river center we go, moving right, then forced left. We confront a rock barely above the surface, invisible in this light. It

pushes us hard left; we react paddling hard right to straighten. The boat runs up on a rock, midship and stalls, pointing almost directly downstream. Current is swift, boat not moving.

'Highside!' The current floods the boat.

Stuck. Stuck on a rock, angling downstream, port side under water and angled 30 to 45 degrees to the waterline, current roaring in the stern and out the bow – can see water streaming out of forward rivet holes. Above the water, the rock was the size of a watermelon. Could not see what it was below.

Standing on the port gunnel: 'Shall I blow the whistle?' she asked. Not a prayer of being heard. 'Sure, good idea.' We were alone, in the middle of a wide stretch of river, maybe 40-50 feet from either shore. In a swift current. Cold water.

A most peculiar sinking feeling settled upon us. Stranded in a broad stretch of a wilderness river, standing on the port gunnel, rocking vigorously back and forth, throwing our weight over the highside gunnel and leaning back toward the rushing water – I then noticed red paint on the rock, but not in the right direction – meaning more of the canoe was sinking beneath the surface.

'Shall we put on our helmets?' she suggested. Excellent. We pulled them out from under rushing water, snapped them into place. With effort, I secured her ball cap.

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

Assessing downstream, a swim would take us out of the swiftest water after a short distance – with some rocks and pour-overs to avoid – it would be bumpy. Then we would head river left to slower water and a scramble to shore.

But the boat. Abandoning the boat meant stranding the boat. Prospects of a salvage from shore were dismal. Water was too swift to permit another boat to assist in a mid-stream rescue. The pinning rock was way too small to afford anyone a landing to help us.

And us. The water was cold. We were thankfully not cold yet, but as we were waist-deep, we sure would be soon enough. The possibility loomed of getting out, sans boat, without warm or dry clothes, stranded on shore.

OK, the action plan. While we still could, we would do whatever necessary to get the boat off the rock. Don't care if it flips, don't care if we swim, just free it. Tied the two painters together, giving us 50 feet of rope for a lifeline, a connection to the boat, if it remains pinned and we swim to shore – never mind the discouraging geometry and physics of our predicament.

Now standing on the submerged gunnel, we emphatically and energetically bounded up and down, pulling the highside gunnel toward us, hoping for any type of movement in any direction. It did at last start to move, sliding off its underwater perch. We threw ourselves highside, the boat slipped off up-

right, and we were in a bathtub. One exciting kiss from a downstream rock/pour-over, followed by a hard, hard paddle river left – we made it ashore.

In the euphoria that followed, especially after finding warm, dry clothes, I felt we had done all the right things. We were lucky, absolutely, but our actions did nothing but contribute to a positive outcome in a serious situation. And we both agreed it would not be necessary to look for new tandem partners.

Actually, though, we had done all the wrong things. We found ourselves unnecessarily alone on a wilderness river, albeit an easy class II stretch. You know though, it is the quieter sections of a river that can get you – sections a class or two below your skill level, where your guard and vigilance may be a bit more relaxed. We were lucky.

By the way, that missing water bottle was actually in the boat, nestled deep under an air bag.



Will and Deb and a rock on another river, the Dolores: close, but no pin!
by Eric Hermann

(Continued from page 1)

tongue seemed to fly into the turmoil at 20 mph! It introduced me to the standard procedure in the rapids: Get a crossing momentum in the tongue, punch a lateral, and skirt the main wave train, usually to the inside of the curve. But a rogue wave and two missed rolls left me swimming in tow behind Matti Wade's kayak. In maybe 85 rapids, I would swim about five times.

Next came Soap Creek Rapid, mile 11. We camped right at its head so I could listen to it roar at me all night. Its tongue ended in a vee wave about eight feet high, and I just took aim at the wave's center, hoping it wouldn't surge just as I topped it. Of course it did, and over I went. Yikes, most of the rapid was yet to come. "I gotta roll, cannot fail..." and I did just that. Hooray!

The Grand offers a fast training course: Ten named rapids churn between mile 20 and mile 30, called The Roaring 20's. They average a 5 on the Grand Canyon's 10-point scale of difficulty. I thought I could just halve the rating to fit the usual 5-class scale, but it doesn't apply here; the water is so fast and the waves, eddy lines and whirlpools so powerful they just demand their own scale. So, getting spanked once or twice more in this stretch wasn't surprising. However, I was learning—better lines and stronger braces. A lesson, first taught by Kent Ford: Learn to use your strokes as braces to combine control

and stability. This demands even more timing. In other rivers you do the moves: you decide to eddy or to surf. Here, the river does it to you, at its whim. One big lateral back-surfed me about 20 yards left, only to surf me again 20 yards right. It was a thrill! Braces kept me upright while the river played with its new toy.

The Larger Rapids: House Rock, class 6 or 7 at mile 17, named by Powell for its huge boulders along its outer curve, and their house-sized holes, was a big challenge for the rafters: Almost all the water roars to the outside of the curve, toward those holes, and rafters must ferry strongly against that power. At mile 76, Hance, class 8, brings larger waves and holes everywhere in its half-mile run. But four of our rafters are professional guides, and Mark Klug and Eric Hehner had rowed it before. Joe had kayaked here, but had rowed only the Yampa—at big water, though. Here he ran terrific lines with



Joe Schmidt rows, Katie Christensen balances in Granite Rapid
by Eric Hermann

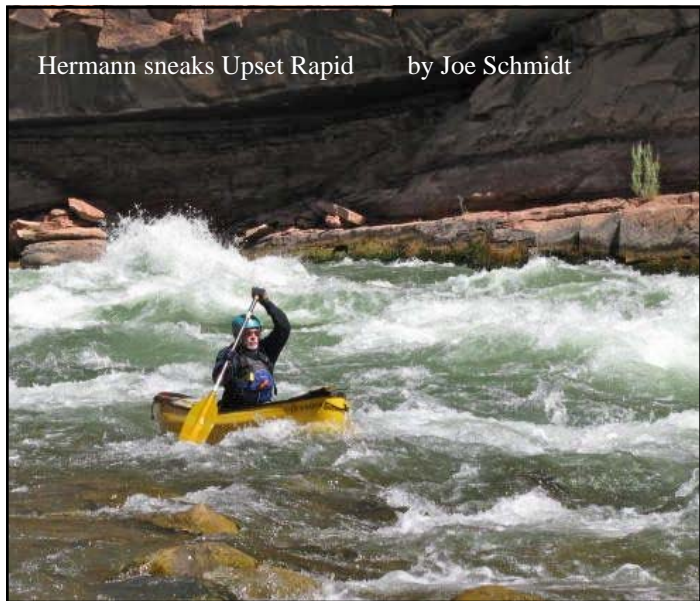
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strong, precise ferries. Skilled kayaker Jeremiah rowed for the first time. All tracked these curves cleanly. Our kayakers, John Gross and Mitch Riley, were so good they just looked for big waves to surf. For me, however, House Rock and Hance were easy sneaks, like the Poudre at medium water, and I cut through the rocky side channels, though in Hance I rejoined the center to ride out some wild waves. However, I became complacent in smaller rapids, like Son of Hance. Here was a hole about 15 feet wide, and I couldn't evade it, so I squared off and punched it hard. The river slammed me into a backward surf—enjoyable for a moment—then into a side surf, where I looked like a banana in a taco shell! Then it spat me out below, where John helped me climb quickly back into my water-filled boat.

Sockdolager is a long class 7 streak through the Inner Gorge of slick schist walls, with no escapes, no real sneak runs, though I entered a bit left to miss a few waves. Again I came out “dry”—only two inches of water in the boat.

Discretion and a blessing: Ahead lay four big rapids in so-called Adrenaline Alley: Horn Creek, Granite, Hermit and Crystal. But along came Phil and Erica, Bostonian fiancés with a 20-foot raft, just the two of them, and decided to run the big stuff with more company. They were great company in camp, with her laughter and his recitation of Poe's “The Raven,” and Service's “Cremation of Sam McGee,” which I shared, and yes, Phil's offer to piggy-back my canoe if I wanted, since it would fit his huge raft well. A look at Horn Creek Rapid and a fierce headwind convinced me, and I became a passenger. After Horn we scouted Granite,

standing next to a three-foot rattlesnake, coiled there oblivious to us and so beautiful and red. I had wanted to canoe Hermit and maybe sneak Crystal but didn't want to delay the rafters, who ran these big rapids without incident. Discretion arose again at Mile 179: Lava, the biggest, baddest rep on the river, has a really easy, accessible portage. Parts of me wish I had attempted it, though I felt 50% sure of a wild swim. Smooth work for the rafters, even though Joe had an oar pop out.



Hermann sneaks Upset Rapid by Joe Schmidt

Katie and Karen high-sided expertly into the big waves.

The incredible beauty of this river: We were so lucky, with the river remaining clear and green all trip, even though it is frigid—48 degrees below the dam to maybe the 60 by trip's end. Rapid tongues are smooth as polished stone. They drop three to six feet into channel-wide waves that gleam like jade in sunlight or like obsidian in shade. It's so easy to fixate on that beautiful wave for a second or two before diving into the boils below. The whirlpools roil up with a “whoosh” as you suddenly spin and flush

(Continued on page 12)

(Continued from page 11)

maybe 12 feet left or right. The eddies pound the beaches with foot-high waves. People say the Grand is 90% flat water, but almost nowhere is it still.

All the geology I read about unfolds, mile by mile, as ancient strata rise from the river, sloping up to hundreds of feet, with origins in seas or mountains aged in millions of years, even 1.7 billion in the case of the Vishnu Schist and Zoroaster Granite that wall the Inner Gorge. The schist can be black or a red like rosewood, often polished like the fine sculpture of Henry Moore. When these layers formed, this chunk of earth was somewhere near the Canary Islands, before they drifted with the continents over the ages. The river is recent, down-cutting the newly rising plateau about 10,000 years ago. Some lava flows are even more recent, now in black masses or hexagonal basalt columns where they once even dammed up the river for 200 miles! These walls tower so high, but are over-topped by more towers, then more, to the distant rims. One night we see a tiny light from the rim, and imagine the lookers there, gazing into the mysterious gorge so far, so inaccessible, be-



Karen Roth and Mark Klug take the plunge by Joe Schmidt

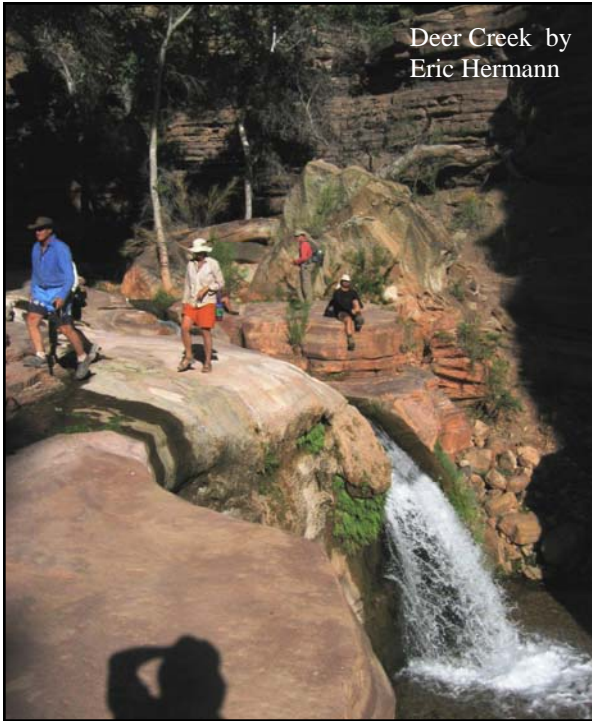


Elves Chasm, by Joe S.

neath them. We flow as tiny specks upon that mystery!

The unbelievable side hikes are usually short but steep, into slots and grottos, up creeks so clear and lush with red monkey-flowers, maidenhair ferns, watercress...and the amazing rocks. Vasey's Paradise, named by Powell after an expedition botanist, is a waterfall gushing from the Red-wall Limestone into the river. We hike up Carbon Creek, cross the ridge to descend Chuar Creek, passing 980 million-year-old deposits that are missing elsewhere in the Great Unconformity. The hike up Tapeats Creek and down Deer Creek is unbelievable: Above Tapeats the Thunder River leaps out of a cave in the Redwall and ribbons down the cliff to join Tapeats Creek. Thunder River, its flow about 50 cfs, is only a half-mile long, and marks the only place in the world where a named river flows into a creek. Deer Creek is a

(Continued on page 13)



(Continued from page 12)

sinuous beauty, clear and water-cressed, that coils into a deep gorge in the Tapeats Sandstone and offers us refreshing showers.

Of course, there is the toll upon the body: 21 days with only occasional baths in frigid water, constant cold feet in the canoe, fingers wrapped in duct tape over the cracks, sandal cuts from the sand, old ankles sprained on hikes, knots in the back from lugging group gear (rafters carry only steel equipment), cactus spines, drug-overdose of 20 days on Aleve. Cranking the old knees into straps about 2,000 times as I go from a precarious sitting position into a kneel. And of course, sand in everything—every face, every zipper, every cut, all your clothes. Sifting like a gritty flour through mosquito netting when the sandstorm winds streak the camps.

And...the scorpion: Ah yes, the little bugger had crawled into the wrap of the dry bag, and hit me like a hypodermic needle as I unrolled it in the morning dark-

ness. Immediate sharp buzz filled the hand, to feel for two days as if I'd grabbed an electric fence and held on. Yet, I had to paddle anyway. Rapids can make you forget all pain, momentarily.

Camps are serene, after they are lugged into place, and beer is cold from the river. Sunsets blaze on sheer canyon walls, ruby, orange and black. The moon—we travel through its phases—rises like a pearl, lacing the rapids' tongues with golden flames, and stars glow sharply so far from human light. We rotate cook crews and make amazing food, in a large kitchen with stove and four Dutch Ovens—Laurie and Betty's deep lasagna, Matti and Miah's peach cobbler—as we tell stories, laugh sing and joke into the night. Well, until bedtime at 8:30 or 9. The sun rises over coffee; we lug the gear to the rafts for another four to 24 miles on the river.

Returning home safely is a delight—to be home with my wife and pets again, and oh, to stand in a warm, sand-less shower—but the Grand Memory is a deep and wonderful one. A view comes, maybe a televised shot from the South Rim into the far-flung vastness of the Grand Canyon. And far, far down there a gleam of the river in its immeasurable passage of time, and then comes that reverie, which says, simply, "We were there."



Unplugged flashbacks are a bad deal, Dude!

Greg Brigham

Mark Riffe, Mike O'Brien, Debbie Hinde, Dave Hoag, and I met at Ted's Place in late June to head upriver for a leisurely four-mile excursion on the upper reaches of our beloved Wild and Scenic Cache La Poudre River between the Elephant Rock and Big Bend campgrounds; also known as the Kinnikinnick Run. The first few miles of the drive up the canyon, on a crystal clear Sunday morning, took us past our familiar sights: the rock gauge reading 4.0 feet, the rafting companies preparing crews, and the Mishawaka crowd beginning to gather. The traffic thinned out through the Upper Mishawaka and Narrows, and the open road allowed drivers and passengers to gawk at the scenery, daydream about the negative experience that swimming Lower Narrows might be, and become sufficiently amped up for the section we'd be boating.

This being only my third run of the year due to a boat failure in May, I was excited to head out on my "new" boat's maiden voyage. I'd practiced my rolls at MacMurry Pond, paddled Filter Plant at high water once, and rearranged the bulkhead, back band, and padding to fit my delicate and tender frame. Ready! Set!! Stop!!!

The put-in on the Kinnikinnick section does not allow one to have a gradual warm-up. In fact, after the requisite beginning-of-the-trip photo session, I requested Mike's assistance while I adjusted and attached my spray skirt and prepared for my entry into the main flow of the river

(clear and swift). I had volunteered to head out first and meet the other three boats in some eddy Mark described as being "downstream." No problem. I paddled out into the current on a nice upstream ferry and promptly had the following thoughts (in order and cleansed for the general public):

- Hmm. Must have splashed a bit of water in the boat while getting in.
- Boat's kind of sluggish.
- Boat's filling up kind of fast.
- Oh shoot. Gosh darn drain plug.
- How far downstream is that eddy Mark described?
- I don't see any eddies at all.

I have desecrated a pure wilderness tale with representations of language that was actually much darker and bluer than the sky we paddled beneath. Not to worry. The thoughts were unspoken. No animals were harmed.

(Continued on page 15)

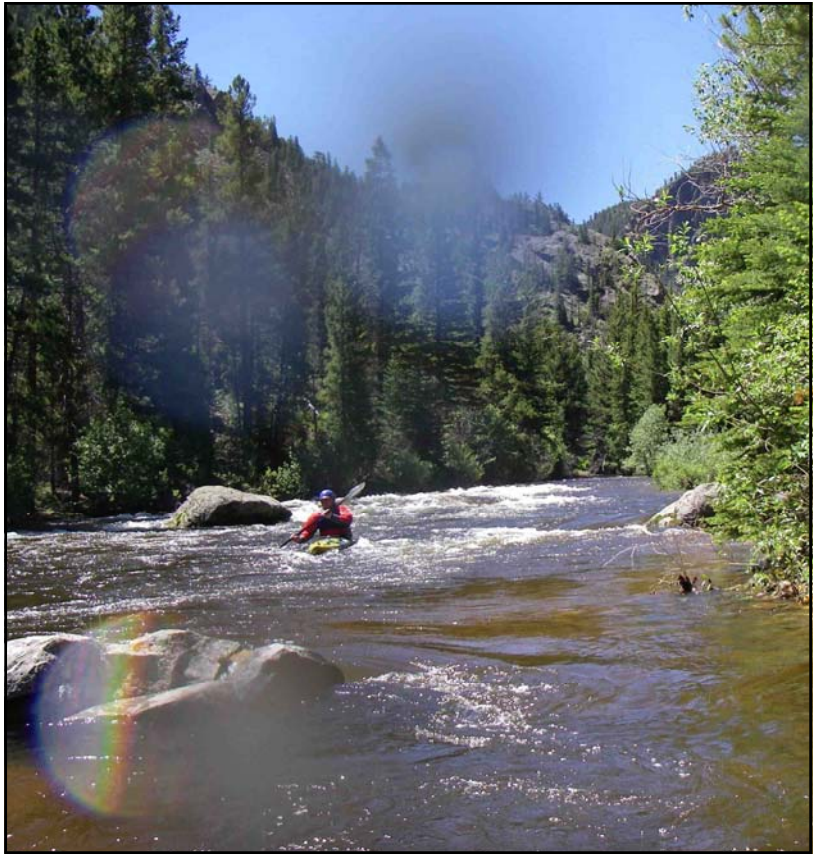


Mike O'Brien demonstrates a "willow brace." Photo by Greg B.

(Continued from page 14)

Here's the flashback: In the classic paddling days of 1990-2000, I paddled a beautiful, long, fast, yellow Prijon T-Slalom with a drain plug. Never forgot to put the plug in. Ever. Had a "friend" (who shall remain nameless) pull it out for me during my first trip through the Royal Gorge. Thanks buddy (JS*)! Side note: The sky and gorge looks pretty cool from a vertical back ender/squirt perspective while crossing an eddy line. I digress. My replacement boat for the T-Slalom, a Dagger Vortex, didn't have a drain plug. Haven't used one for several years. My "newer" version of the Vortex does have a plug. Back to the story.

The first quarter- to half-mile of the Kinnikinnick run is rather continuous class II+/III- white-water at high levels. Lots of fun on most days. With the turn of events I've described, I was having more adventure and slightly less fun than I'd imagined while driving. The quest for an eddy, any eddy, was on. Turn's out, when the Poudre is running high, riverside eddies become more than scarce. About 200 yards or so (I didn't measure) further down the river, I lumbered into a usable micro-eddy on river left and scrambled out of my submarine while remaining upright. Yay! I then put the drain hole to good use for a couple of minutes, sponged out the remaining water, carefully screwed the plug into place, got back into the boat, and performed a baby seal launch to re-enter the river. Thus ends the dramatic portion of this tale. The rest of the crew waited patiently for me in "The Eddy" for the period of my du-



Greg Brigham on Kinnikinnick, but not unplugged!

ress.

The remaining three and a half miles were uneventful, yet spectacular and fun: trees on the banks creating strainers, tall waterfalls appearing high above in the canyon walls (not visible from the road), clear blue skies, windless paddling, half-hour eddy conversations, small surf waves, careless drifting around corners, and lunch on a mid-river log pile away from the red ants –all combined for a memorable day on the river. While other members of the group headed for town, I added to the pleasure of my Sunday afternoon by hiking the steep portion of the nearby Roaring Creek Trail and spooked a deer or two along the deserted trail. A good day by any measure.

* Ed. Note: Ask Katie Christensen who JS is.

Ruby Horsethief

In autumn: Amazing Color

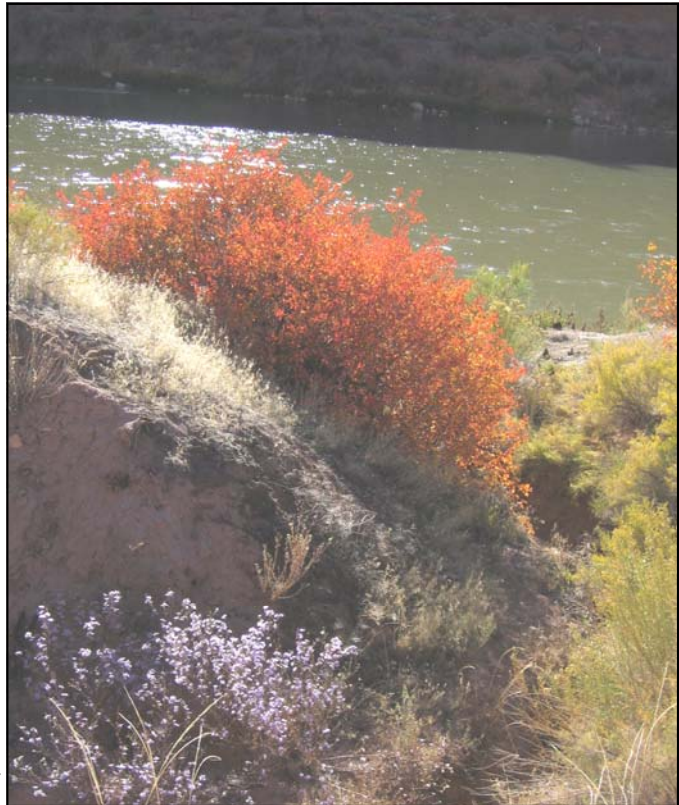
by Roger Faaborg

Ed. Note: Check out the colors on the website copy!

On Saturday, October 10, I was shoveling snow and the high that day was 26. The following weekend, I had signed up to float the Colorado River through Ruby and Horsethief Canyons. What was I thinking? Amazingly, the cold weather left and we had sunny warm days for our float.

I car-pooled with Randy Knauff the 300 miles to Fruita, where we camped night we camped at Robb State Park. There are several Robb State Parks, so make sure you specify the one at Fruita, which is very nice with hot and cold running water, showers, and a laundromat. The park is walking distance to a bunch of restaurants, motels, and a dinosaur museum. Some of the group stayed at the Super 8, just across the street.

We joined Tom and Mary Peck, John Conaway and Vicki Hamilton, Dave Conaway and Julia Batten, and Eric and Connie Hermann at the boat ramp at Robb State Park on a morning typical for the trip—in the 40's. But as soon as the sun came out, it warmed up into the 70's - 80's. You really had to dress in layers. In the mornings everyone had stocking caps and winter coats. By noon I was wearing a t-shirt.

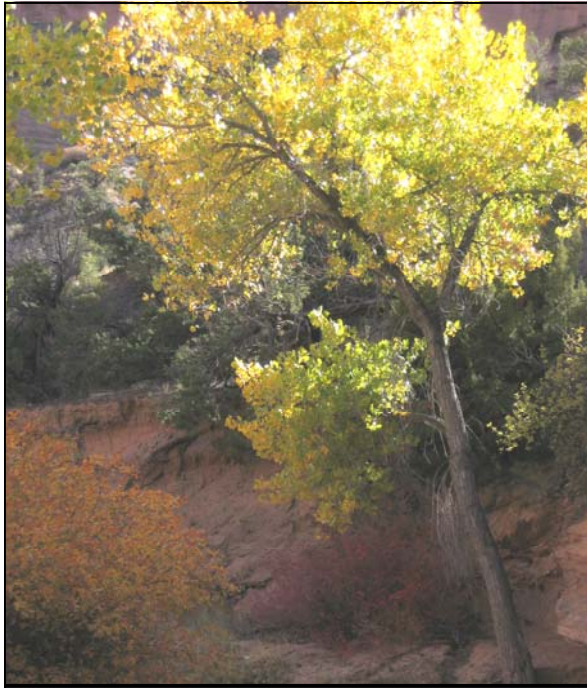


Asters and sumac highlight the river, by Eric Hermann

Friday morning we unloaded the boats and equipment at the put-in and drove the shuttle to Westwater, about 30 miles from the put-in on I-70, exiting at the Westwater exit for 10 miles or so on a rough blacktop road to the take-out. Below that, Westwater Canyon holds class 3 and 4 rapids, so when you are floating the river, you don't want to miss the take-out. Thankfully, it's easy to see.

Finally we started paddling. Cottonwoods were in full fall color, seeming to glow in the sun as if they were a source of light, rather than just reflecting it. The first stop was at the Loma put-in, where we signed up for each night's campsite. Signing up doesn't guarantee a campsite, as someone may already occupy it, but it is

(Continued on page 17)



Sumac and cottonwood in Knowles Canyon
Eric Hermann

(Continued from page 16)

kind of a request that others don't plan on camping there. Next time, we'll sign up on our way TO the shuttle drop!

We stopped for lunch at the Cottonwood Campsite. We then continued to Mee Camp #3, 17 miles from our put-in. Most named camps had several campsites, each holding up to 16 people. The popularity of this float has resulted in the BLM starting a permit system in 2011. So next year is the last year you can float without getting a permit.

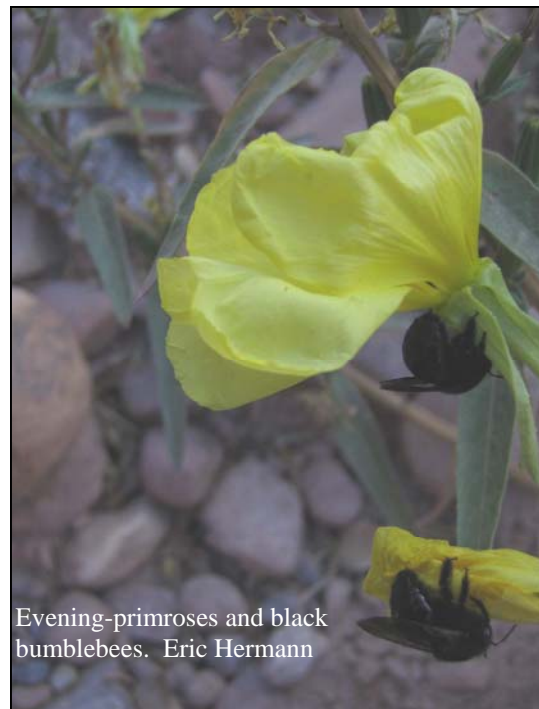
As in many rivers in the Southwest, invasive tamarisks along the shoreline have been cut down and replaced with small cottonwoods. Campers are asked to water the cottonwoods, and we did. We stayed two nights in Mee, so we had plenty of time to hike into Mee Canyon. There are a few pools of water in the canyon, but it is mainly dry. Yellow Bridges evening-primrose grow in the dry stream bed.

Eric pointed out the single-leaf ash trees that turn yellow and three-leaf sumac, which adds red to the color mix.

Those that stayed in camp were watching a desert bighorn climb down the side of the canyon. It would sit for a while and then continue climbing downward. It was easiest to see when it was moving and when the sun reflected off its white rump. The people in camp had to exercise their descriptive skills as they pointed the sheep out to each returning hiker.

The next day we headed down the river. Ruby-Horsethief is pretty much flat water with one rapid at Black Rock. The tour books say "Black Rock Rapid, the only significant excitement on the Ruby-Horsethief stretch, is a fairly straightforward Class II-III rapid, but it can be safely skirted by inexperienced boaters. The river narrows considerably as it passes through a rocky stretch

(Continued on page 18)



Evening-primroses and black bumblebees. Eric Hermann

(Continued from page 17)

just below Black Rock Rapid. This creates an unusual and often tricky series of whirlpools and eddies that can cause problems for canoes, kayaks, and small inflatables, especially at high water." The river was running at around 4000 cfs on this trip. We went through Black Rock rapid and then beached

Connie Hermann enjoys the cottonwood display



on river left to look at Black Rock Campsites for future trips. When we got out, Randy Knauff thought we were stopping to scout Black Rock Rapids. So the rapids didn't amount to much at 4000 cfs. But at higher or lower levels, it might be a different story.

After leaving Black Rock, some of us hiked through McDonald Canyon to see what I called "petroglyphs." Later, around the campfire, some Colorado Mountain College students corrected me, saying that what we saw was a pictograph, which uses pigment to paint, or draw, on the stone. Petroglyphs, which are carved or chipped into the stone, line the walls farther up McDonald.

We hiked to the end of McDonald Canyon, to a hole in some rock with about a 20-foot drop to a small pool.

That evening we camped at Knowles campground, in the shade of many cottonwoods trees. Knowles has a nice beach area.

On Monday we paddled the remaining distance to the take-out at Westwater. Around the border between Colorado and Utah the ancients carved steps into the side of a cliff to help climb. You can see these in the next photo.

You can paddle the 29 miles in two days. Three is better, and we took four. Unloading and loading equipment from your boat and setting up tents and cooking equipment is tiresome and time-consuming, so having a lay-over day is really nice.

Ruby-Horsethief is a great float with great side hikes. If you get a chance to float Ruby-Horsethief, I highly recommend that you do!

Exploring Black Rocks camps



Canoe Quotes Collected by Debbie Artzer

Anyone who says they like portaging is either a liar or crazy. Bill Mason 1929-1988

Take everything as it comes; the wave passes, deal with the next one. Tom Thomson, 1877-1917

What sets a canoeing expedition apart is that it purifies you more rapidly and inescapably than any other travel. Travel a thousand miles by train and you are a brute; pedal five hundred on a bicycle and you remain basically a bourgeois; paddle a hundred in a canoe and you are already a child of nature. Pierre Elliott Trudeau

I think it much better that, as we all go along together, that every man paddle his own canoe. Character of 'The Indian' in The Settlers in Canada by Captain Marryat (1844)

Everyone must believe in something. I believe I'll go canoeing. Henry David Thoreau

If there's a place, Canoe there. Brent Kelly

A true Canadian is one who can make love in a canoe without tipping. Pierre Berton

I have no life to bother me wife,
No lover to keep me true,
All day long I laugh at this song,
And paddle my own canoe. The Brigadoons, Martinstown, Ont.

.. and to any others who have felt the thrill of the back country and still long to explore what might lie just around the next bend. I know of no better way of doing just that, than having a fine canoe under one's seat, a sleek paddle in one's hand, a little bug dope in your pocket, and a harmonica near the top of your pack." Book dedication from Kenai Canoe Trails by Daniel Quick

From the movie, THE AFRICAN QUEEN:

BOGART: "How'd you like it?"

HEPBURN: "Like it?!"

BOGART: "Whitewater rapids!"

HEPBURN: "I never dreamed..."

BOGART: "I don't blame you for being scared - not one bit. Nobody with good sense ain't scared of Whitewater..."

HEPBURN: "I never dreamed that any mere physical experience could be so stimulating"

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