

Pikes Peak River Runners

Gotcha in the Grand Aug 2003 Colorado River Grand Canyon



By Louisa Bradtmiller, Denny Claveau and Christina King
Photo Credits: Bob Marley ([his trip journal](#)) & Christina King

Day 1 (Aug 20, 2003), Mile 19 Camp

Our Grand Canyon trip has come together quite quickly with quite a few recently added participants. It was just a year ago when Bill Cooke called in for a Grand Canyon permit cancellation while driving on the Boston Turnpike. The usual suspects were not available to join the trip, so we had many newcomers on this Grand Canyon trip. Our group demographics are primarily Colorado (except for Bob/Susan Marley), AARP's, oldest being 70 (my dad) and youngest being Louisa (~24). **Bill (permit holder) and Irene Cooke (trip leader), Bob Marley & Susan (Groth), Pat Campanello, Dave Wimmer, Louisa Bradtmiller (Cooke's niece), Jethro Grantham & Terra Geiger, Denny Claveau, Ed Tucker (my Dad) and me (Christina King).** Pat, Louisa, Denny, Jethro & Terra had never run the Grand Canyon before and were eagerly anticipating this trip. This trip story includes Louisa and Denny's first impressions of the Canyon. I always enjoy a first timer's perspective of this trip and have a hard time explaining the river trip to others who have not gone down.



We arrived yesterday and shoved our fully rigged raft off the trailer (what a nice feeling). No rigging for us. Dave had arrived extra early and had already begun his hiking adventures by hiking up to the top of Spencer trail at the Lee's Ferry put-in. Quite a vertical climb!

Our first morning before launching was full of last-minute packing, stuffing, nervousness, and excitement. It always takes a long time to get off the beach and this trip was no exception. We have 2 catarafts, 4 rafts, lots of gear/food and one deflated ducky (bet it does not get used much). The Paria river tributary is running

brown so we only have clear water before the Paria riffles blends the brown with the dark clear green of the river below the dam. It was an easy decision for Dad (Ed) to skip fishing this trip as it is obvious that the Paria has mucked up the river from the beginning. It is such a relief to finally launch and get on the river after all the hard work Irene has completed (i.e. herding cats). I have been a trip leader many times and I think the hardest work happens before the trip launches and it becomes much easier once we get on the river.

Dave Wimmer rowing House Rock Rapid in May 2003, just a few months ago. Nice clean water.

We ate lunch after a successful runs in Badger Creek and Soap Creek rapids. We stopped to scout House Creek Rapid (a tough rapid), and I ran center and pulled hard right to avoid the huge hole at the bottom center/left of the river. Several people say you can sneak left but I do not see it. I have always run right and only made a mistake once and got pulled left into the hole once (first trip down in the late 1980's). I have avoided the hole ever since then. My advice for others "don't follow Bill"!



Denny exclaimed after the rapid that he noticed the hole on the left and was glad we missed it. This is Denny's first trip and I have asked him to keep a journal to include in this story.

We saw two stout bighorn sheep today (rams and we will see many more this trip) and camp at Mile 19. I ran sweep today with Bob running lead. Running lead can be stressful, as the first boat has no one to catch them in case of mishap. Bob runs lead most of the trip (until Lava). We got to camp late and had a quick dinner with much joking about staying up until 8 pm. The rest of the trip we pattern ourselves off the sun and

wake up early (launch by 8 am) and retire at dark. It gets dark about 7:30 as it is getting towards the end of August.

As I go to bed tonight on my boat, I reflect that this is my first Grand Canyon trip without Pete (my husband). Both of us love this trip and spend at least 6-8 or more weeks per year on the river but work interfered, and Pete had to back out of this trip just a month or so ago. We always run our own boats, but I will miss him on the trip. As I fall asleep tonight, I wonder if he is thinking about me. It is great to have a successful and safe first day with Dad and Denny in my boat. I am less stressed when I run my boat with only gear because if I flip, I only have to worry about myself. There is nothing worse than flipping and not finding your Dad right away

(1992 trip with Dad - first and only flip in Lava)! I have a cozy bed set up on the boat on top of the cooler. This is the first time I have run Pete's Avon Pro SB (16 foot) in the Grand as I usually run my 14-foot Avon Adventurer SB. It feels bigger and heavier, but I like it. I can barely reach the foot kick bar when making a big pull, but it is okay. I quizzed Dad and Denny all day with little hints about our [Grand Canyon trivia game](#). It will become an entertainment activity on our cook days later in the trip. Little do they know some of the "semi-valuable prizes" will be considered valuable by some of our group!



Denny: First Impression? Curiosity, trepidation, wonder and WOW! Lots of stuff at Lee's Ferry. If the people were smaller, more Mongolian looking and weather a lot colder I might think we were headed for Everest Base Camp. My eyes are drawn irresistibly downstream towards the vibrant painting that is Marble Canyon, the beginning of our 225-mile journey. Great group of people all respectful of each other, civil, fun and a quirk here and there. No slackers (maybe me). Scouted our first rapid (House Rock) and I was a bit nervous. I am beginning to feel as though I am with the canyon and not just in it.

Day 2 (Aug 21) Silver Grotto

Last night was a quiet night in our calm eddy. Many of us slept quite close to each other (with a small beach). Susan has a peculiar method of making coffee which looks like a sweat sock attached to a board that coffee is run through and prepared. Since I do not drink coffee, I think it a bit odd but the coffee drinkers in the group

love the taste. Go figure! It is a cool morning, and our routine is established. This group is gung-ho at launching by 8 am. I admit I appreciate the early launches but as the trip goes on, I think it a bit obsessive, especially when people get cranky if we are not off by 8:30 am. This trip is extremely well organized (like many we have been on), but I wonder if we have too many Type A's (which I count myself as one) on the trip. The Roaring 20's rapids drench us with splashy cold waves and we have been lucky to have flows of 20,000 cfs every day. We have been told that the flows will drop down to 8,000 cfs on the last 4 days of our trip but who cares by then. I love running the Grand at high water with the brown murky water. That is the way the Colorado was meant to run (before the dam).

We stopped at a cave below Cave Springs Rapid on the left and poked around in it with a flashlight. We continued down river with Denny rowing (to keep warm). It will prove to be a relatively cool and rainy trip this year. Denny learned how powerful Colorado River eddy's can be and got sweaty rowing to get out of strong eddies. We arrived at our planned Silver Grotto camp in time for lunch. This is a 16-day trip so we can afford to take short days and enjoy the hikes and interesting side canyons. Silver Grotto is such a fun canyon for a group adventure.



After lunch we climbed, scooted, and slithered up Silver Grotto but out of the blue the weather turned on us. Clouds gathered, thunder boomed, and we shuffled out quickly. This is not a place to get caught in a storm. Our ropes helped us get out quickly and the threatening clouds scared us. I was glad to get out safely and we enjoyed grilled brats/beans and coleslaw while the storm gathered. It did not end up storming, but the variable weather stayed with us most of the trip. I have gotten the rest of our group quickly competing for "semi-valuable prizes" with our [Grand Canyon trivia game](#). Denny nicknames them "semi-precious gifts" but I insist that prizes are earned, and gifts are not. I notice that not only is this [AARP](#) group focused on comparing prescription drugs (filling pillboxes, etc....) and retirement benefits but also loves thrift store bargains. It is becoming a one-upmanship contest about who can tell the best thrift store bargain story. I think Dad has it locked up by describing going to the Goodwill on 15% off Wednesday's and bargaining down items by 0.50 cents. Yup, he buys used men's shoes and is enormously proud of that. Silver Grotto is not a boat-sleeping camp and I sleep on the soft sand at the river's edge as the water comes up all afternoon.







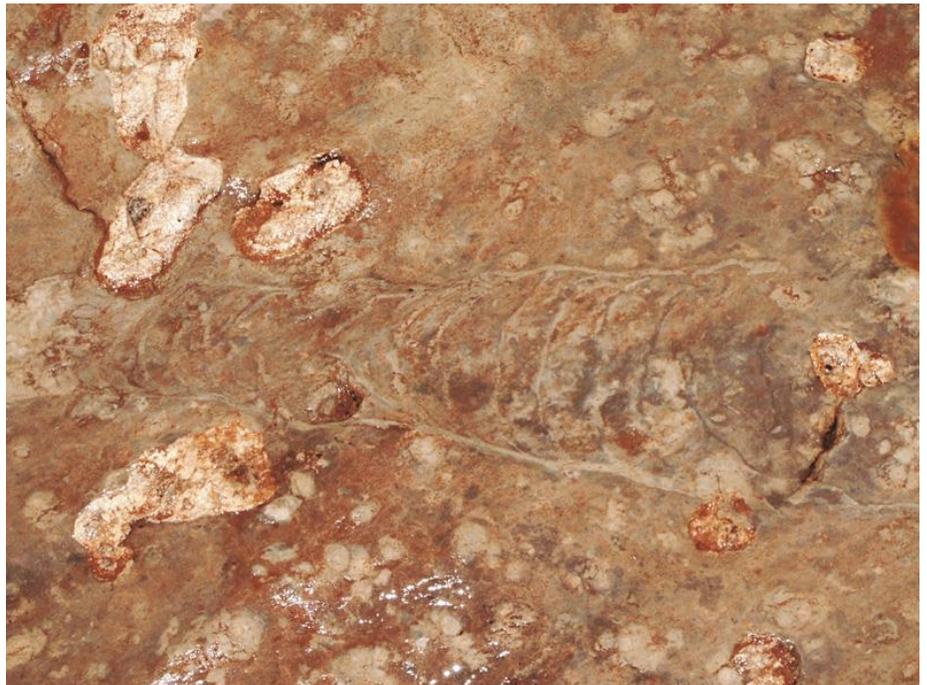
Denny: Swam, roped, climbed, and hiked into Silver Grotto but were chased out by thunder and risk of flash flood. This is what you read about. Early morning, so many bats, so few balls. The river turned vivid red overnight to match the canyon wall across the river from camp. The red earthy colors leave me breathless. I run several easy rapids today.

Louisa: We went to climb up into Silver Grotto, a series of pools and scrambles just 50 feet or so from our site. The first slope was the steepest, and I was the first up with the help of a rope from Aunt Irene and Susan. After we got everyone up with the rope, we proceeded up the pools, and Irene and Susan came down from the ledge and back around to meet us. By the time we all got to the last slide- many swims and scrambles later- we heard thunder and slid down ASAP for fear of a flash flood. Except Jethro, who was going slowly due to his camcorder. Also has a laptop. Anyway, good teamwork got us up and down with no problem.

Jethro reveals a new gear gadget item every day. By the end of the trip, I tally it up and am amazed that the 19-foot Maravia raft held it all. But then again it was a 19-foot raft! Yes, there was a laptop computer on Jethro's boat...

Day 3 (Aug 22) - Buck Farm

Our first stop today was at South Canyon where we stop to see Anasazi ruins, bighorn sheep and the Indiana Jones cave (which peeks over South Canyon around the corner). Pat had a case of beer delivered by a friend of a friend (boatman on a motor rig) and Bob filled up drinking water at Vasey's Paradise. Again, it is a cool morning. We played Frisbee at Redwall Cavern and I offered up a small "semi-precious gift" to the first Grand Canyon newbie who spies a nautiloid at Nautiloid Canyon. Louisa won but it was a bit unfair. Louisa is working on her PHD in Geology at Columbia. Yes, this trip is making her late to her first day of class, but her professors gave her a break. After all, the Grand Canyon is every geologist's dream.



Denny rowed his first Class 3 rapid (Scale is 1-10 in the Grand Canyon) today (Mile 36) and did a great job. Denny really enjoys rowing, so I try to give him all the rowing he desires. Tonight, we pull into Buck Farm to camp and "battened down the hatches" when a big windstorm came up. I slept on the boat again and used my "mushroom" sand anchor. It works well for one boat and keeps me in the water (and not beached when the dam-released water goes down). I recommend it for rivers that have sand bottoms. It also helps keep my boat from bumping into other boats during the night. Bill pulls out the first of his many "camo" (camouflage) T-shirts from [Sportsman's Guide](#) and Dave echoes his appreciation for this catalog store. Dave and Bill reveal that they are Sportsman's Guide "Buyers Club" members. Bill swears that he has ordered camo underwear for

Irene. We see many camo shirts the rest of this trip. Even a sky-blue shirt that disguises Bill from the rest of us. Yeah...right!

Denny: I am in cuisine shock. The food is marvelous. It is fine dining in a restaurant with incomparable views. The Canyon is so stunning I am overwhelmed with emotion. The emotion is so strong it is almost painful. I think of those I love and wish they too could see and feel this.

Day 4 (Aug 23), Nankoweep

This morning started with a dipstick water war that had many alliances (made and broken). Dave started it by lamely saying he just missed a pull on his oar as he sprayed us with cold water. Denny pretends to think that water fighting is beneath him, but Dad does not hold back. Dad is a dipsticking fool and finds it hard to stop (even to the point of getting a dipstick blister on his thumb). We visited Bert Loper's boat where Louisa had a minor injury mishap.

Louisa: Today was an adventuresome day. Our first stop was Burt's boat, and getting out of Dave's boat I slipped and gouged out a little of the heel of my hand. It hurt but is looking much better now. After that there were a few major water fights, with Ed and Denny being the major culprits, before we got to Saddle Canyon creek. We hiked up the side canyon despite the thunder and rain at times, and after making our way through a fern-filled gorge at the end got to a beautiful little waterfall. The place was so lush and green it looked very out of place.

Dad and I thought we would have some nice quiet time while the rest of the group hiked up Saddle Canyon but no. The weather deteriorated quickly, and we had to put on our warm gear and sit in the rain. After lunch we ran President Harding rapid cleanly but noticed that Jethro and Terra's boat was setting up strangely above the rapid. It is almost as though they could not decide which side to run.



It turns out that they switched rowing at the last minute and ran down the left side (but much too close to the rock). The thunderous eddy behind the rock sucked them in and they spent the next 15 minutes or so, rowing like crazy to get out of the eddy. The boat spun around, surged below the water line on the sides of the boat and through a joint effort at the oars and pulling with all their might, they finally got out. They were spent. Bob got some nice pictures. The rest of us really thought they might flip but their boat was so heavy and big I really think that helped them stay upright during the eddy surges.



We got to Nankoweep our camp and set up the tent. Several of our group went up to the Anasazi Granaries to enjoy the view. Denny has a family game called Gotcha. The premise of the game is that if a person says something outrageous and another person says, "really" it is a "gotcha". Dad drives Denny crazy by not playing the game "correctly" and blurting out "gotcha" when it really is not a "gotcha". Soon the group joins in and "gotcha" is blurted

daily and everyone laughs until they cry. It continues on the trip and soon Denny refuses to acknowledge the gotchas. It is amazing what can be funny by Day 10.... Jethro cranks up his Margarita blender (a.k.a. weed whacker motor) and makes Margarita is for the group.

Denny: I struggle to hold onto the fleeting images. I am greedy and do not want to give them up to my imperfect memory. Sumptuous smells up Saddle Canyon because of rainfall and the thunder rolled and echoed in my mind "the music of the Grand Canyon Suite". This was a day of earthy pungent smells, canyon thunder, Anasazi ruins topped off with Jethro's frozen margaritas. Nankoweep granary ruins gives up its best view of the canyon from on high.



Day 5 (Aug 24), Upper Rattlesnake

I tried to sleep in the tent last night but between the stuffiness and Dad telling me to stop snoring, I finally left the tent for my tarp and slept outside in the sand. It drizzled a bit but finally stopped raining. It dawned cool and clear today (no sign of the condors- we have seen here on other trips). Probably too cold for the condors. Everyone agreed to a water fighting truce today as it was just too cool. Denny rowed Mile 60 rapid with a noticeable increase in confidence. We saw lots of groups on the river today and stopped at the Little Colorado River (LCR). It was muddy as expected. Denny had the sharpest eye today and spotted the Desert Watchtower on the South Rim today. This is the only place I can recognize from the river as being a man-made feature. We stopped above Tanner Rapid to visit the petroglyphs at the Birthing Rock. Everyone ran the hole at Tanner rapid on the left because they did not recognize it in time. This really shakes my confidence as I saw it in plenty of time and did not run it. I know I am a very conservative boater (and that gets me in trouble) and tend to read the river well in advance. That does not mean I do not screw up but at least I know I am screwing up ahead of time. I really hate watching people get in trouble and worry for them as much as for me. Plus, I like to know that if I mess up, someone



will be below to pick up the pieces. We eat lunch above Unkar Delta, visit the Anasazi ruins, and admire the broken pottery shards. The pottery shards reveal skilled and roughhewn designs with many patterns and colors. Oh yes, we scouted Unkar Rapid at the same time. We pull into Upper Rattlesnake (did not see any snakes) camp and enjoy the hot temperature. My dry bag has sprung a leak so the hot flat rocks around camp



are perfect dryers for my wet pillow and sleeping bag. Nearby are some rocks set like a granary. Dad and I think they are fake (built by modern river runners) but some in the group think they could be real. Denny and Dave went for a hike up the ridge before dinner. There is lots of evidence of fresh flash flooding in our camp but the evening settles in quietly with no thunderheads. Thank goodness.

Denny: Big hike with Dave to about 2000 feet above the river. Astounding views of the cathedral surrounded by its Herculean pillar walls. The Grand Canyon is the giant sprawling child of its slender, small, and graceful mother river. Splendor surrounds us.

Day 6 (Aug 25) – Above Salt Creek

Today is a big rapids day, The Inner Gorge! I awoke to wet dew all over my formerly dry sleeping bag. There is quite the crowd at our first major inner gorge rapid, Hance. A motor rig supporting a large contingent of eastern C1 whitewater canoes run this rapid before us with the utmost grace and skill. The C1 canoes carve and cut their way through the chaos of waves and holes with no mishaps. We scout and about half of our group decides to enter right and the rest left. I chose right. This is the lowest flow I have seen at Hance, but I decide to enter right, and row left. I mostly succeeded with my plan but hit the left part of a big hole on the right side. At least I hit it straight! Pete always reminds me to "trust the boat" and in this case it really proves true. All ended well and it did not seem to matter which way any of us entered. Hance swept everyone to the center right no matter which entry we each took.

Sockdologer and Grapevine were the next big rapids, but the holes were not there at this low water level. As we dropped into Sockdologer, I hunted for that monster hole on the right, it just was not there. Grapevine had the same effect, the hole on the left was not significant. Susan thought that the rapids might have changed but my guess is that the water levels changed the rapids. The hot rock walls in the inner gorge must be seen to be believed. They look so primeval.

Denny: Inner Gorge reminds me of Bierstadt paintings.

We stopped at Clear Creek (not at our usual cliff spot) at the beach and enjoyed walking up the streambed to the falls. Poor Bill stubbed his big toe and tore a hefty chunk off the bottom of his toe. I try to save the skin chunk to put it jokingly in our 32-mile chicken dinner day at the end of the trip (but it is a joke leftover from previous trip, and no one appreciates it). Bill's toe does not heal until he gets off the river many weeks later. Every night Bill cleans and bandages it and even Irene cringes when looking at the raw flesh. It is not a pretty sight. Pete would say "looking at Bill Cooke never is".





We enjoyed a hot (short) stop at Phantom, mailed postcards, had lunch, and got some mail from friends and family on the outside. My sister sent Dad and I some treats, cash for ice cold lemonade and the always appreciated spare Chapstick. I know we have lost a few Chapstick's already. The most recent postmark I see in the boatmen's mail is Aug 6 and it is Aug 25, so it appears to be quite a lag time for mule mail delivery. Louisa sums up our next big rapid, Horn Creek with exactly the right description.

Louisa: Today we got to Phantom Ranch, which was a trip. Weird to have civilization and tourists in the middle of this place. After Phantom we rowed for a bit to Horn Creek rapid, where we had another good run. We split the horns and went right into the hole at the bottom, where the boat buckled and bashed me in the face. Ouch!

I did not run my usual left or right to left run but dumped over the hole between the horns with a loud "kerchunk" over the rock like everyone else. We came through fine, but I pulled hard to the left to avoid the big hole at the bottom. Horn is harder at low water! Of course, the skies and canyon walls were dark and ominous while we scouted Horn Creek rapid, and we are all tired from a long day. I am so relieved that we all made it through okay, except for Louisa's face bashing by the boat. The motor rigs tried to help us get an open camp above Granite and we got Salt Creek (I think). It is a nice, quiet camp on the left and we scattered to bed as the storms began after dinner. I sure do miss Pete. It would be nice to let him know that we are okay so far. I fall asleep on the boat festering about tomorrow's big series of rapids starting with the wall at Granite.

Day 7 (Aug 26)- Ross Wheeler camp

Denny nails the day in his description below.

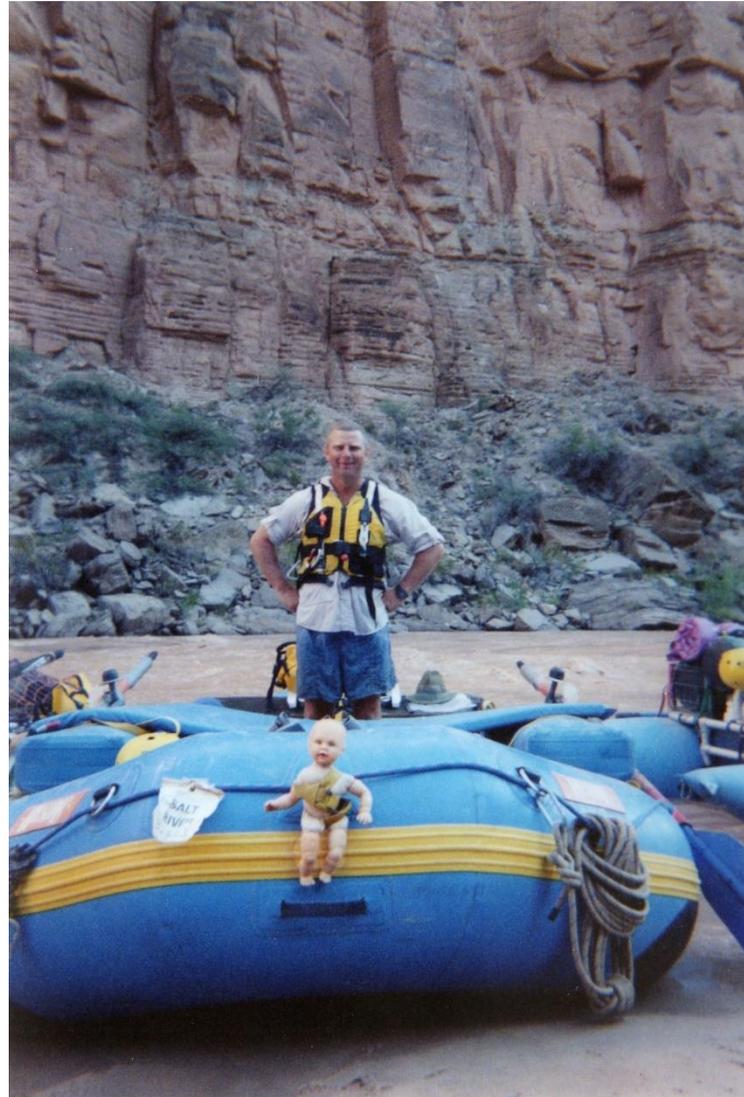
Denny: Big rapids, bigger rapids, really big rapids, Big Horns, big day! Just when we least expect it, we are almost dumped by an eddy whirlpool. Christina moderates Arizona/Grand Canyon trivia bowl for semi-precious gifts. Much fun.

Louisa: We left camp and were soon back out of the boats scouting Granite. We made a clean run to the left, which made me feel better about the next two big rapids coming up. Soon we stopped to scout Hermit, which looked just as fierce. We started to the left and made our way to the middle so Uncle Bill could catch the 'wave train'. The waves were enormous on this rapid, but his boat just sliced right through them, so it was amazing and tons of fun. Highlight of the day.

Granite was the first rapid of the day and I had a great run down the right side. Denny exclaimed that the trough of the waves were higher than our heads when climbing them. Yep, that means about 16 feet or so. The group wants to scout Hermit, and this really gets me out of my routine as I have never scouted Hermit rapid before. Until last year, I always ran Hermit (unbelievable waves) right down the middle at any flows. But after becoming more conservative and watching others flip in front of me, I have lost my nerve. I sneak it on the left. As we scout Hermit, Susan notices the funniest things. She comments on a minutely small blue flower in the path and spends some time looking at it. All I can think of is Hermit. A bear could be doing the hula on the Hermit scout path and I would not even notice it. A bit Type A, do you think?! Everyone else talks about sneaking Hermit on the right and once again I wonder what they are seeing. I see NO sneak on the right (never have). At the last minute everyone agrees to go left (I never deviated from this plan) and we all do okay. I have a messy run on the left (did not straighten up in time) and hit part of a left wave sideways. Oh well, it was not perfect but okay. Jethro runs the middle of Hermit but since he is way back, we do not see his run. He said it was big, which I believe.

We stop for our last big scout at Crystal and all slop over the rocks on the right side. Ugly but very functional runs. Irene spies a child's "baby doll" in the eddy below Crystal and straps her like a good luck hood ornament to Dave's boat as a mascot and names it Crystal. Dad's cheap 11-year-old well used Wal-Mart "Cheva's (Teva's) fell apart today, and he is using my backup sandals. Us Type A's have quadruple backups so little does the group know that Dad has many cheap spare shoes to go before they all give up the ghost (which many do before the trip is over). Again, the AARP's echo their devotion to thrift stores and bargains. They must be subconsciously saving their money for their children, I guess. We run the rest of the Jewel rapids (Sapphire, Ruby, etc..) successfully. However, after one small rapid I got sucked into a strong eddy and it really gave us swirly and tipped us on end.

It is nice to have the last two days behind us with no mishaps and I am looking forward to no festering and a mental vacation the next few days. Everyone thinks Horn has been the most difficult so far, but I think Granite is the most intimidating. I enjoy rowing the bigger boat but miss my 14-footer. It moves quicker and I know I can move it easier. We camp at delightful Ross Wheeler camp (large open sand beach above Shinumo Creek) and relax.



Day 8 (Aug 27)- camped below Blacktail Canyon- Forster?

It rained again and I had to drag my raft bed under the kitchen tarp with Denny and Dad. Denny had a mouse scamper across his head in the night. Not very restful. Hot and stuffy. Cloudy and cool in the morning with a

stop at Shinumo waterfall. The ducky made its first appearance. Waltenberg the only rapid and not big. Warmed up nicely later in the day.

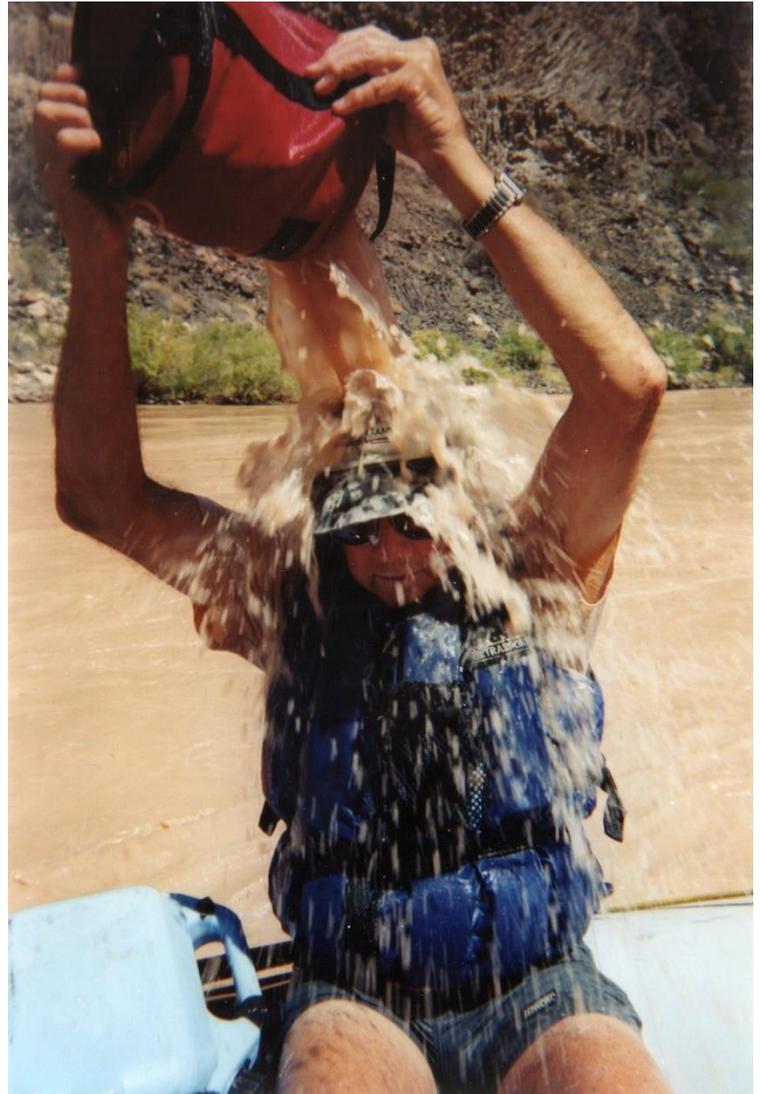
Denny: Today is a lazy day on the river. Time passes contentedly. Elves Chasm is exquisite. I meditate here. Nirvana is near. Blacktail Canyon is quiet vaulted splendor with "water music". Handel would love this place.

Louisa: We rowed a bit to get to Elves Chasm, a beautiful series of falls and pools with a big waterfall at the top. Ferns and moss, beautiful. The water was perfect for swimming, and lots of people jumped off the lowest ledge into the pool.

Enjoyed a peaceful stop at Blacktail Canyon with the ledges and quiet drip, drip of water falling. The shadows were a nice break from the glaring afternoon sunlight. Everyone got to enjoy the day and float as they wanted. I called Pete last night on our satellite phone (only for emergencies) to let him know that we got through the Inner Gorge okay. Only the Cooke's know we have a satellite phone for group emergency use only (not a group cost) on our trip. I brought a spare battery so feel okay about using the phone for a 10-minute talk with Pete at home in Colorado. I promise to call him after Lava Falls rapid later in the trip with an update. Our beach gets huge as the water goes down and I hear beavers slapping and Bill fussing with his toe as I go to sleep.

Day 9 (Aug 28)- Tapeats- Thunder River

Dessert for breakfast is becoming a routine as many of us go to bed early. Our first stop of the day is to hunt for Fossils at the broad wash at Fossil Canyon. Specter rapid has big standing waves and we stopped to scout Bedrock. I have never scouted this rapid and enjoyed peeking at the "Doll House" rock structure above the rapid. Bedrock was an easy pull to the right with lots of room. We scouted Deubendorff rapid next (another first scout for me) and once again the group confounds me. I hear everyone say they will take the right run (enter right and pull right) and I do not get it. I run my standard left to right (center) run and it is fine. This group is making me doubt my eyes when we scout. I think I have figured out not to put too much stock in their description of the runs and trust my instincts (and river reading). We are probably seeing the same thing but describing it much differently so I will try to stop letting it shake me up when our descriptions do not match. It turns out the group makes my identical run, so I am sure that it is just a description thing. Tapeats is open so we take this camp at the mouth of Tapeats Creek. It is a crummy (buggy, small and dirty-well used) camp but it sets us up perfectly to do the Thunder River/Deer Creek loop hike the next morning. Dave makes an evening hike to Thunder River knowing that he is going again the next morning. Dave is a hiker extraordinaire!



Denny: The peace of the canyon is shattered as huge dipstick battles erupt on the river. Like rolling thunder confrontations... Alliances are made and broken quickly. We take broadside after broadside hits, but our little craft is dauntless and wins the day. We quietly float to camp.

Louisa: After dinner we saw an amazing meteorite! It had a trail from all the material it was burning off as it flew. It was lit up for at least 10 sec...

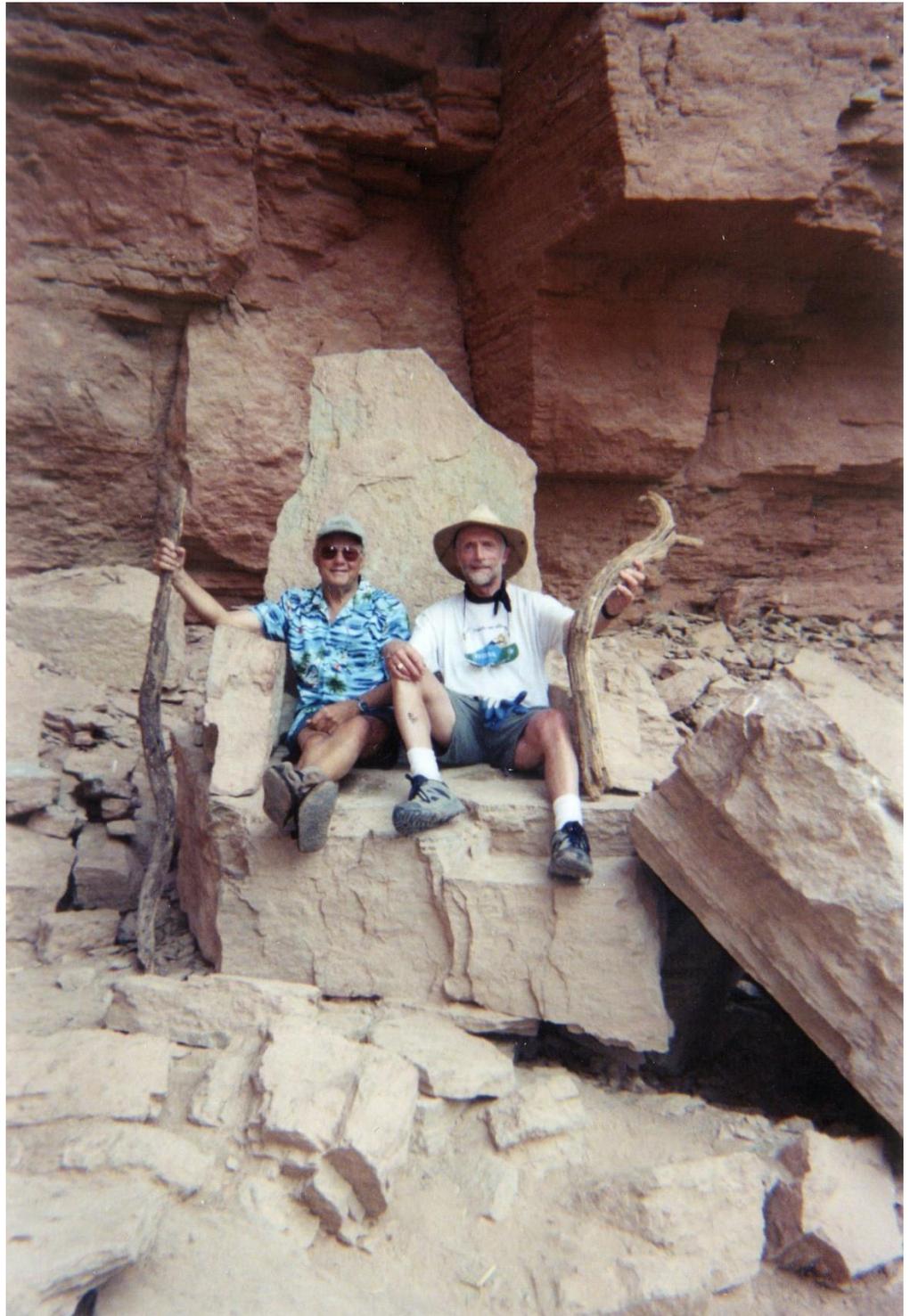
Day 10 (Aug 29)- Panchos camp

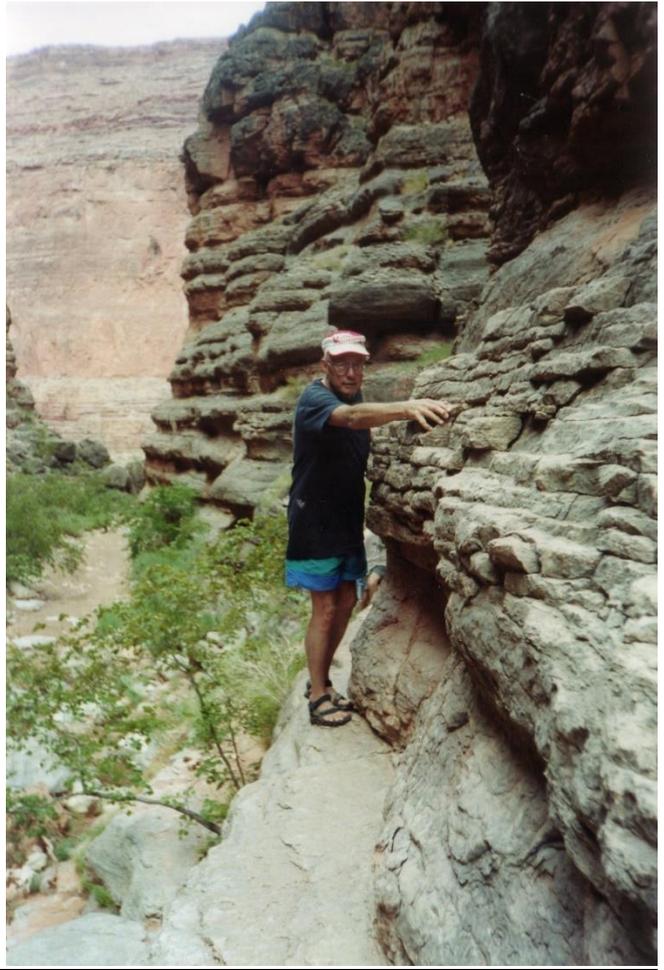
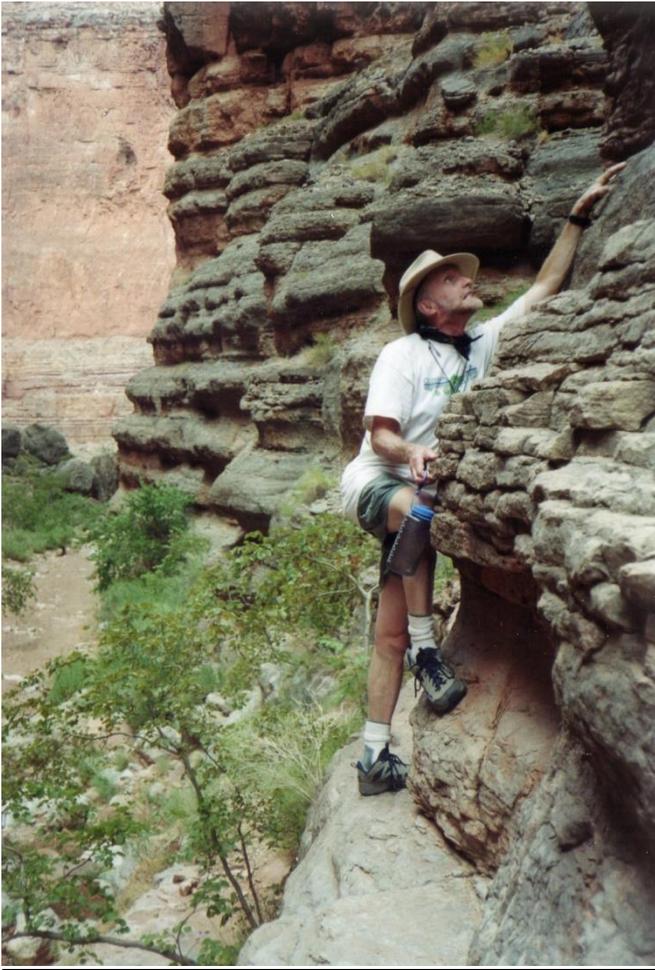


Denny: Dave, Terra, Jethro, and I leave around 6 AM for the day loop hike to Thunder River ending at Deer Creek. We encounter two awakening rattlesnakes along the way as we travel up Tapeats Creek. Dave treats us to a ripe prickly pear cactus fruit that tastes sweet. At Thunder River the trail gets steep again and the river tumbles out of the cliff wall surrounded by lush green vegetation and grand bouquets of red Monkey flowers. Waterfalls are everywhere until we reach the red canyon wall where the river springs in whitewater fury from out of the rock itself. Moses himself would have stood awestruck had his staff produced such a deluge. Sweet Lord, what have you done now! We top out high above the spouting river and find ourselves hiking across the Tonto Plateau, an arid rolling landscape about 2000 feet above the Colorado River. It is hot as we gradually drop into the notch that begins our rapid descent into the Throne Room (with another spring erupting out of the cliff wall). The rest of our groups meets us here. The hike down the Deer Creek trail includes a refreshing shower in a lower small fall, walking along a precipitous slot canyon and ending with a sparkling 100-foot silver white waterfall plunging into the Colorado River.

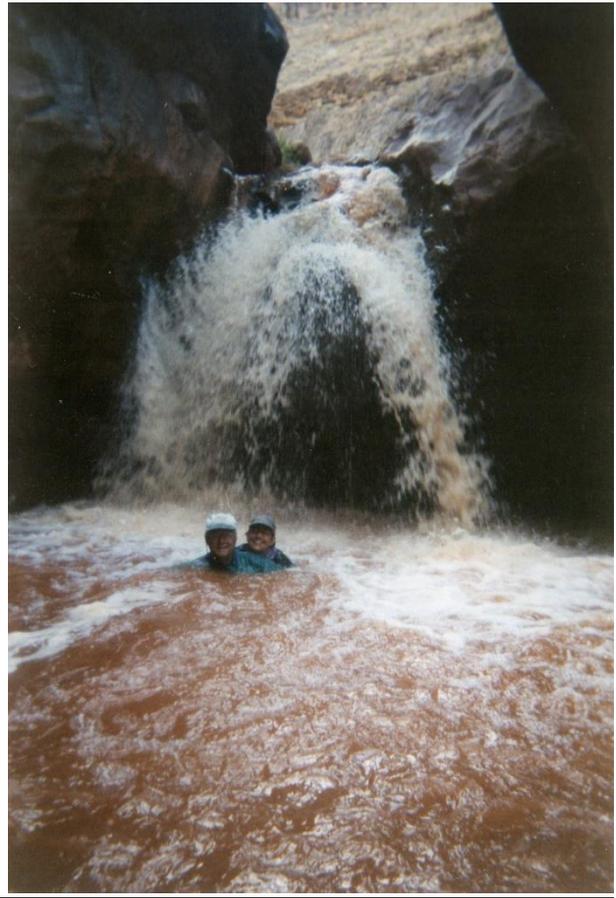
Louisa: We pulled into Deer Creek Falls and looked at the beautiful waterfall before heading up the trail. After a bit of a steep start, the trail went on a ledge over the stream for a while. There were a few great pools to sit and play with before continuing along the stream through a little valley. After one more steep climb we were at the source of Deer Creek, a waterfall right out of the rocks up high. After filling our water bottles, we headed to the Throne room for pictures, lunch and to meet the rest of our Loop hikers I slept on the boat last night, and slept well, so I think I will sleep there again tonight. The shooting stars cannot be beat.

We camped at the white sandy beach called Panchos with a nice shady overhang. Everyone was beat and happy to have a nice camp to relax.





Cliffs



Waterfalls



Everyone has an opinion on Groover Placements

Day 11 (Aug 30)- Ledges

Ran some easy rapids (noticed that Kanab camp did not look so good) and pulled into the mouth of Matkatamiba canyon.

Denny: Matkat- slip-sliding away in neck deep water. We camp on Ledges within the Walls of Paradise. I enjoy a cigar, a little Wild Turkey, Edward Abbey, and Henry Thoreau as I relax and get even closer to all of this tonight.

Louisa: I rode with Dave again, and rowed for quite a while. I rowed through Doris and Fishtail, which are both listed as 6's. New personal record! Matkat was a sweet little hike up some pools, until the top where is flattened out into a creek. We made a large butt-dam with 9 people, everyone was amused. Uncle Bill, Denny and Ed found the Velcro plant.

Upset was our big rapid before camp and we scouted it and ran right. All got through okay. Ledges was open and we got to camp at lunch (a trend on this trip). Everyone seems a bit tired and cranky in camp, so Louisa suggests a drinking game with Gatorade shots. With this dehydrated crowd, that is a perfect idea! I have camped a few times at Ledges, and it is always very warm.



Tonight, the boats are restless, and they rub each other all night. I let a few of the boat lines out at night and finally bail out of my boat to sleep on shore. Even the boat bumpers would not stay in place and the squeaking noise finally got to me (even with earplugs).

Day 12 (Aug 31)- National

We leave camp early, to slip into Havasu for the day. Jethro misses the eddy at the mouth of Havasu but manages to pull into the cliff below the motor rig tie up area (in fast current). I do not know how he managed to pull in down there as it would be very tough with his heavy boat, but he got tied up successfully. Jethro brought everything but the kitchen sink in his big boat. I have figured out that his rig carries the following: guitar, ducky, laptop, cots, beds, baby pool, LOTS of beverages and food, many coolers, and dry boxes (too numerous to count), video camera, weedwhacker engine (a.k.a. margarita mixer), duraflame logs (fills a large dry bag), "love couch", boat gear, personal gear and more???? Jethro's 19-foot self-bailing Maravia is a "big" rig and it sure can take on the big rapids well.

Denny: We moor our rafts at the mouth of Havasu Creek. How the hell are we getting to the trailhead? I only see a slot in a rock wall with a bunch of dories and rafts attached to the wall by carabiners and bobbing around in what appears to be a bad situation. Everyone but me seems to think we are going somewhere. Then, Christina drops off the raft and disappears under a raft and swims up the slot. Then more people are doing the same. How do they know they will not die? Because I am stupid, I drop in the water also and fight my way between and around boats risking death by drowning and being crushed between a raft and the sheer rock wall while swimming upstream. I make it to the slot to find a line has been run down from the lead raft to a safe place about 75 yards upstream. I make it to the safe place and the rest of Havasu that I see is anti-climactic compared to the adventure of reaching the safe end of the rope. For some inexplicable reason, I think all of this was great fun and high adventure.

After our adventure entering Havasu, we move on down to National Canyon to camp and hike to beautiful, sculptured bowls. One bowl gently sends its ribbon of water to the next. We jam ourselves between the tight walls to gain access to the upper bowls and falls. A huge butt dam quickly released causes extensive flooding in the lower part of National Canyon almost drowning Irene who waited for us downstream.

Louisa: Dave ran a rope up Havasu Creek so we could pull ourselves in. Soon the creek began to form beautiful blue pools and waterfalls, which continued as far upstream as I walked. I slid into some of them, swam around, and the whole group generally took it easy. National is a great camp. Denny, Dave, Christina, Aunt Irene, and I hiked up the side canyon as far as we could, and the end of the hike was a chasm a little like Matkat. Best of all it was in the shade. On the way back we saw Ed and heard about how he provided echoes for the dory group who did not see him. Now I am in the shade on our big beach, thinking about Lava tomorrow. People seem nervous, but I think it will turn out ok whether or not anyone flips. We will see.

Jethro and Terra were the only ones ambitious enough to hike all the way to Beaver Falls. The rest of us enjoyed Havasu and puttered around the different pools. We floated down to National Canyon for camp. After hiking up the canyon we were stopped by a 20-foot waterfall at the end of one of the slithery pools. Dad enjoyed playing an echo game prank on an unsuspecting dory group that camped below us. They never figured out that Dad was reclining on a boulder (within plain sight) mimicking their echoes as they hiked up the canyon. Many hikers passed within a few feet of him and never saw him. They were concentrating on looking down that they never saw him. The canyons are so steep that many details can be missed while hiking but this was a whopper. We enjoyed a good laugh over his story.

Group injury report: Bill- ripped toe callous at Clear Creek (not pretty), Dave- many foot hot spots with lots of duct tape protection on raw skin (ouch), Bob- twisted knee at Matkat (using a walking stick for a cane), Irene- sore knee and many bruises (slips and falls on rocks and boat frame), Louisa-scabs, bloody noses, possible

broken toe and lovely bruises- bloody shirt is looking lovely by now, Pat- sprained ankle at Upset (very puffy and bruised). The rest of us are okay for now. Today is our last cooking duty camp and we prepare a tasty ham dinner with much talk about Lava Falls rapid tomorrow. Susan showed me a nautiloid fossil on Oracle rock (large, sculpted rock on beach at camp). It has also been said that if the water is at or above the base level of Oracle rock then the left run at Lava is open. The water is at the base. I have only run left at Lava and hope to again. The right side of Lava (at the levels I have seen it) looks too big and scary. I rearranged the boat tonight to get ready for the Lava Falls run tomorrow. The trash and groovers are beginning to smell ripe. Most are getting ready for bed by 8 PM (dark) but I am festering about the rapid tomorrow. My first flip in 1992 was at Lava with my Dad. I do not want to repeat that again. Flipping is not fun!

Day 13 (Sept 1)- LAVA FALLS ESCAPADES! – Whitmore camp

What are we doing running the biggest and toughest rapid in the Grand on Day 13?! This is when we usually run it, so I guess I will not be superstitious. We touch Vulcan's Anvil for good luck and head down to scout Lava. The left run was open, and we all ran left (to varying degrees). No rapid pictures of our group because we ran together. However, Bob got some fabulous pictures of other boaters while we scouted the rapid. Dories and motor rigs. My guess is the flow is around 11-12,000 cfs.







Denny: This morning we are greeted by condors gliding high above us as we leave camp. We think this is a good omen for the day as we are headed for the biggest of all rapids in the canyon, Lava Falls. Excitement and danger lie ahead. "Ignorance is bliss" so the saying goes and as a novice rafter I am pretty much at ease as we approach Lava. I have noted though, the boat captains are a LITTLE more nervous, slightly stressed, and vigilant as we stop to scout the mammoth rapid. As we scout, we watch a whitewater canoeist skillfully run the growling, heaving, spouting brown water. This is followed by four commercial river dories. The dories rise and fall like leaves topping huge waves then dropping out of sight between them. Two of the dory boatmen/women lose control of an oar and madly row the balance of the rapid with one oar. I begin to lose my "blissful ignorance". Back in the rafts we begin our approach to the edge of Lava Falls. One of our rafts makes it through the raging torrent, then the second raft sets up incorrectly. Christina, our captain, cries out that they are too far right. A



moment later we see one oar go vertical as their boat flips in the ledge hole at the worst point of the rapid. Christina tells us to hold on as we drop into the rapid. Our first responsibility is to make it safely through the rapid before we can help rescue the passengers and boat. My attention focuses on the monster wavers crashing over us as Christina skillfully guides us through. We emerge at the tail of the rapids to find ourselves safe and sound. The flipped boat and passengers are okay, and we pick up Susan. The next two hours are devoted to recovering and righting the flipped boat. We move to our campsite and spend the evening recounting Lava and the flip event of the day. This is the last of the really intimidating rapids we will encounter on our journey. No physical injuries but a little psycho-trauma may be the only injuries other than a broken oar. My "blissful ignorance" is gone. Tonight, we have tremendous lightning and thunder rolls through the canyon. I am mesmerized by it. One of the Canyon's many delights.



Louisa: Dave went first at Lava and took a good hit but made it through. Bob disappeared over the water line, way right of where Dave had been. Pat was next, and then as we approached, Bill said of Bob "I think he's flipped". Sure enough, as we entered the rapid, we saw his boat upside-down in the ledge hole, getting tossed back and forth. We could not see either Bob or Susan, and after we ran through the first hole Uncle Bill yelled back "there's nothing we can do" and kept going. He was right, of course, but it was disconcerting not to see either of them on the surface. As we exited Lava, we started to look for their stuff. We came close but not close enough to two dry bags, which were eventually picked up by a motor rig. Looking for those got us turned around, though, and after a near-perfect run on Lava we got soaked in Lower Lava. Soon after we saw their boat coming near, and this time we were close enough. I leaned off the boat and clipped our rescue line to the straps holding the paco pad, and we started to tow their boat away. It was hard, slow going and we could not get

into the first two eddies. Finally, Uncle Bill got me close enough to jump out onto shore, still holding the line to their boat. By this time, we saw that Bob and Susan had been picked up, and I felt better about that. I fought a strong current to keep hold of the boat, until I was able to wrap the rope around a rock. Soon (but not soon enough, I thought....) Jethro and Uncle Bill made it up to me to help, and everyone followed. We tried to flip it over right there, but the current was too strong, and we were not very well organized. So, Dave and Bob got on the upside-down boat and started to head (float aimlessly, despite their one kayak paddle...) downstream. Eventually Bill and I caught them and threw them the bow line to tow them to shore in a little eddy. Once everyone arrived, we got the boat righted. It turned out that they had not really lost anything except one broken oar and a raincoat in the end. Just as we were starting to relax, Dave spotted the seat to Bob's boat and swam after it but was too far away. He called for me to bring him his boat, and I was on my way when the seat started coming towards me. So, I drifted over and grabbed it myself, and picked him up to take us back to shore. By this time, my hands really hurt from all the rope holding, and lunch was much appreciated.

I cannot describe the Lava Falls carnage any better. [Susan gives a great account in their internet story](#). Fortunately, everyone else had safe runs and all ended well. We stopped at the Whitmore pictographs and floated gratefully into Whitmore camp tired but happy that Lava was upstream. Tonight, was hot, windy, and stormy again. I think today was the last of the big flows and the river should go down to 8,000 to 10,000 cfs for the remainder of the trip.

Dave Wimmer and Dave Sample running Lava Falls in May 2003

Day 14 (Sept 2)- Granite Park

We awoke to another cool morning, but it warmed up nicely. The dipsticking wars became too vigorous and Louisa got a direct shot in her eye. Dad and Denny were very remorseful at making Louisa's eye tear up and were very subdued the rest of the day. I advised Louisa to milk it for all she was worth and really make Denny and Dad work hard to redeem themselves. At least get them to wash her dishes tonight after dinner. Had lunch at our camp (Granite). This is our usual 32-mile day, and it feels funny to stop at noon in camp. It is too hot to walk about much, and we try to find shade with no ants (hard to do). These are some of our usual camp discussion topics; prairie dog (killing thereof), environmental issues (only profound topic), shapes of rocks, cliffs, etc., how to do tasks (correctly and incorrectly), dipsticking, dipsticking strategy, camp with tarp or not, set up tent or not, weather (hot, cold, rainy) and Grand Canyon trivia. You would think with Bob and Susan Marley on the trip we would be more intellectual (NOT). Our brains are taking a break. Everyone is thoroughly enjoying doing what they want.



Louisa: The most exciting part of my day was rowing through 205 mile (Kolb) rapid. Coming up to it, it did not look that bad, and I did not know it was a 7, or I probably would not have done it. I am glad I did, though, there has got to be a first time, I guess. Anyway, Christina and Bill and I all went through together, and as Bill went through, Christina yelled back "Don't do what he did- follow me!", so I did. Turns out later that Aunt Irene had told him to take a conservative route in case I followed... But I followed Christina right down the tongue and pulled hard right just as she had. She cleared the big hole on the right, but I was not strong enough, or did not start early enough for me, and we ran straight through it. Luckily, I had straightened out the boat beforehand, and we went in and right out. I struggled to keep it straight the rest of the way, and got knocked around a bit, but generally did ok.

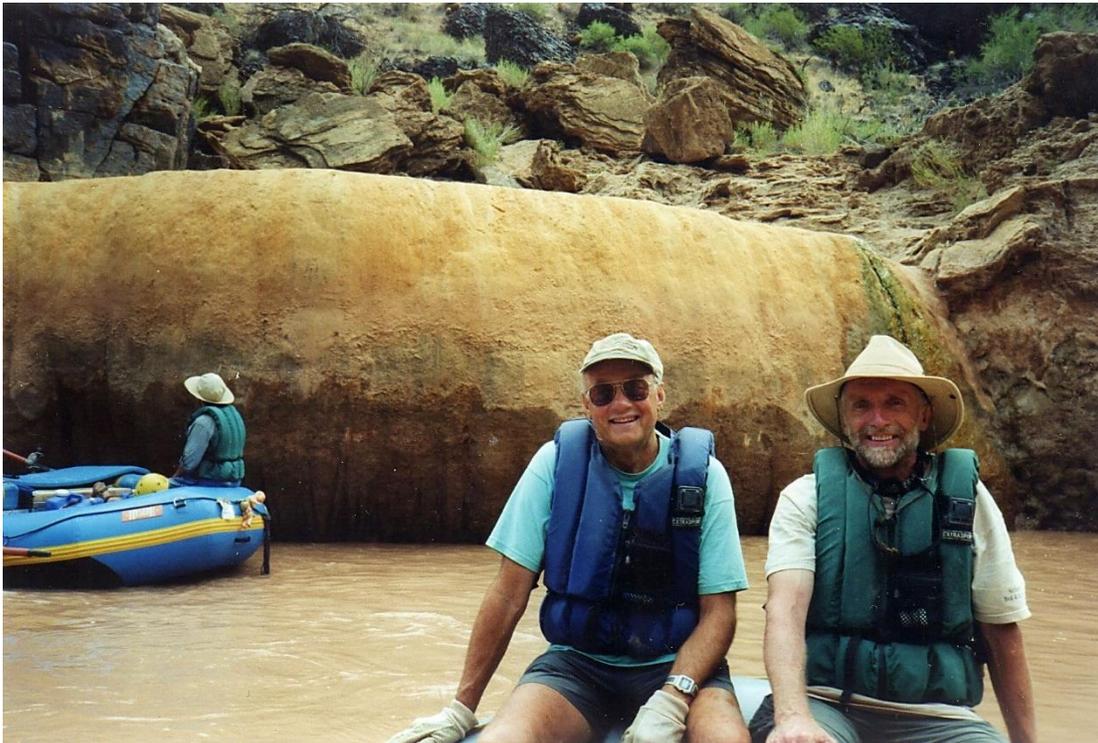
Denny and Louisa have really caught on to rowing and reading the river. They have figured out how to recognize eddies and try to stay out of them (not always easy). Quite an accomplishment. I would bet that they did not imagine they would be rowing through the rapids before this trip started and they appear to like it. I have not seen any big horn sheep since Havasu maybe because we have entered the dry area of the canyon with less vegetation. No one seems to be playing the "Gotcha" game anymore as we just do not believe anything anyone says. There is no fooling the group anymore. I sit above the hole at Granite Park

listening to the waves in the hole crash and break. I am anticipating our last full day on the river tomorrow. It has been a great trip!

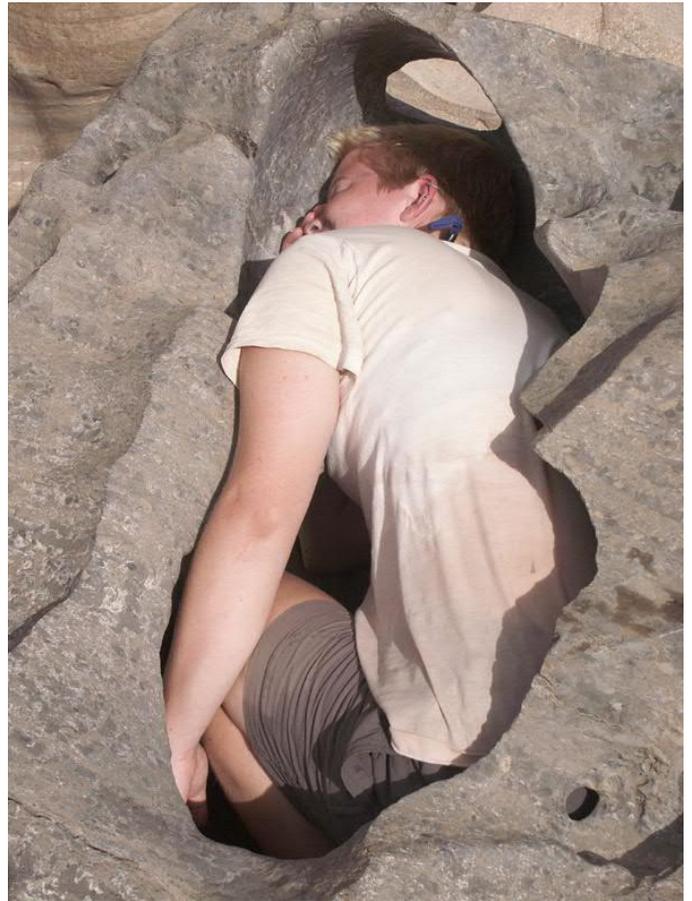
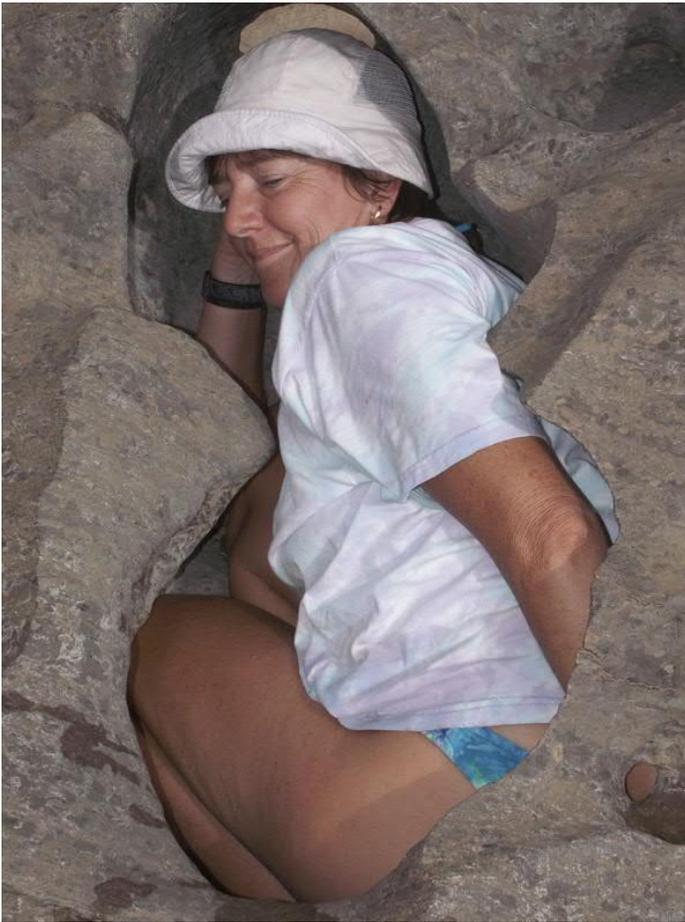
Day 15 (Sept 3)- Mile 220

What a storm we had last night! I saw lightning through my closed eyelids underneath my tarp. The rain and wind whipped my tarp around. All of us hid out under tarps for many hours with pelting rain pounding on my head. Poor Louisa's tarp was too small, and she was soaked through in the morning. Denny "tacoed" himself underneath his tarp which meant he could not move even one millimeter for fear that his tarp would whip away in the wind.

Louisa: Did not sleep very well last night thanks to the torrential downpour...



Bill started the morning by running the hole at Granite Park rapid to "clean his boat". He has a cat with no floor, what cleaning could it need for goodness sake?! I think that was a "Gotcha". Gotcha game is back. Bill, Pat, and Louisa played a very sneaky "Gotcha" on Dave and Irene today. They planted an unopened full can of beer in an eddy and pretended to "find" it in front of Dave and Irene. The rest of the day, Dave and Irene scanned every eddy with pinpoint precision to find more cans of beer. But alas, they came up empty-handed, imagine that?! The pretenders confessed in camp and Dave was not pleased to hear the trick.



Susan showed us a lovely rock cliff above Pumpkin Springs called Womb Rock. We stopped to look at the pictographs at Three Springs and headed down to lunch and early camp. We enjoyed swimming during the long hot afternoon. Bob and Susan made a special Birthday/Anniversary cake for me last night and it was yummy.

Denny: And so, our journey continues. Wonderful, sun splashed days with towering mushrooms of thunderheads poking above the Canyon walls every afternoon. The great walls of the Canyon are always imposing their mighty presence on my awareness. Tiny rafts appear as miniscule bits of flotsam against the backdrop of the steep walls. Days come and go in a lazy carefree way. Evenings pass slowly and comfortably with wonderful meals, lively fun-filled chatter, and quiet reflective time to read or just sit and wonder. Christina's Grand Canyon trivia nights are fun and the prizes for success in trivia range from semi-precious to precious. I, fortunately, won a precious gift by begging weeping and groveling. I am not ashamed. The combination stainless steel compact folding flatware sets is more than worth the total humiliation I subject myself too.

Day 16 (Sept 4)- Takeout day at Diamond

Dave had the craziest nightmare last night that had us all awake (except for him). Dave was sleeping in his boat next to mine and about 1 AM he stood straight up and began singing a hymn really loud. Others in camp could hear it. He then asked me who was out there, and I could tell he was really confused, and I told him he was having a dream. Then he proceeded to tell me he was not having a dream but was having a "nightmare". He finally went back to sleep when I told him he was fine, in the Grand on his boat, tied up on shore and who was here with him. The next morning, he told us that he had a dream that he had floated away from shore and

was drifting down the river in the dark. I know I have woken up before with a start with that same feeling but never started singing a hymn! I guess those late-night drinks gave him a wild imagination. He did not remember any of his late-night singing or conversation but did remember his dream the next morning.



We delayed leaving camp, as the Hualapai Indians at Diamond Creek have requested that all boaters show up at the takeout after 10 AM. We are only 4 miles from the takeout, so we take our time leaving. Of course, we worry about getting caught by building afternoon storms that can close the creek road, but all is okay. The road is very rough but after a long sweaty de-rigging and loading exercise we leave the Grand Canyon after another successful trip.

Denny: Our journey ends at 10 am at Diamond Creek takeout as we beach our rafts for the last time. There is a frenzy of activity. Straps removed, coolers lifted out, oars stored, groovers lifted, gear stacked, framed shifted and boats deflated. Everything fits into Canyon REO's waiting truck. We cram our overheated bodies into the air-conditioned van (complete with iced beverages and snacks), and we are off in a mad rock & roll trip through an ancient streambed that had been washed out in about a dozen places. After about 30 minutes of body pounding (at twice the speed the van was intended for) we reach pavement and are off to the finish line in Flagstaff at 92 mph. So far, the most dangerous part of the trip. The Sears parking lot is our final scene of decommissioning the expedition. At an even more frantic rate the truck is unloaded, and the "stuff" redistributed to our vehicles and trailers. We say our goodbyes and express our gratitude and happiness for a

great adventure and for new/renewed friendships. The actual journey is over, but the Canyon will always be with me alive in my mind. The people, rapids, waterfalls, side canyons, colors, camps, food, hikes, and feelings. Most of all the feelings because ultimately in this netherworld of the Grandest of all Canyons sensations and feelings outstrip all verbal efforts to hold on to this experience of a lifetime.

Louisa: Last night was a blast- martinis, champagne, and more trivia. Take out today was relatively painless- everyone worked hard to get the boats taken apart and all the gear in the truck. We rode back with our English racecar-like driver Joe. Stopped at Delgadillo's on the way for lunch. It is a weird, funky touristy place on route 66 with old cars and blocks of salt... Then on to Flagstaff to get the cars and load them up, which went smoothly again. Took a shower at Motel 6, boy do I feel CLEAN. Finally, we met Christina's crew, Pat, and Dave at Sizzler for dinner. We had a hilarious time as usual, with the salad bar, the senior discount and about 35 plates.

As a final thank you to our fearless permit holder and trip leaders, the entire group chipped in on a pedicure for Bill and a Sportsmen's Guide gift certificate for Irene. Irene informed us that no one would want to take on Bill's toe, so she was taking the pedicure and Bill could buy all the camo underwear he wanted with the gift certificate. A successful end to a great trip. Thanks to Bill and Irene Cooke great leadership skills (oh yes and the permit too). Thank you also to Bob Marley for his fabulous digital photography included in this story. Thanks also goes to Louisa and Denny for sharing their personal and eloquent journals with me (and the rest of us in this story). Their journals described the Grand Canyon in a way I never could. Finally, thanks to my husband Pete who always makes me laugh and has the utmost confidence in my rowing (and remembers to remind me to stop festering at times and enjoy myself). I missed him on this trip.



