

Pikes Peak River Runners

Splat the Ringtail Cat! Aug 2009 Grand Canyon, Colorado River



By Christina King

Photo Credits: Christina King & Entire group

Trip Participants (16): Anne Pierce (permit holder/trip leader), Christina King, Keith & Ava Fuqua, Nick & Anne Olsen, Dana Eriksen, Mike Sims, Melissa Broch, Lyle Hancock, Rick Behning, Bill & David Crockett, David & Ben Christiansen, and Ron Bauer. We are primarily from Colorado with two from Montana, one from New Hampshire (formerly lived in Colorado) and two father/son teams.

Statistics: 9 rafts and two kayaks, river flows ranged from 10,000 to 17,000 cfs until Day 10 and then dropped to a steady 10,000 for the remainder of our trip.



Sat, Aug 22, 2009: Pagosa Hot springs Resort

Keith made one last trip to Wal-Mart to pick up his mushroom anchor before we left Woodland Park, Colorado and we were finally prepared for our 15-day Grand Canyon whitewater rafting trip down the Colorado River. Because our launch day at Lee's Ferry Arizona is Monday and we are not allowed to rig until Sunday afternoon, we plan a short travel day to Pagosa Springs, Colorado. This allows us to keep our ice packed coolers out of the desert heat for an additional day. We splurge by staying at the wonderful Pagosa Hot springs resort. Stress and sore muscles relax in the warm water as our vacation "officially" begins. I called Pete to check in on his golf day and he told me that our house was under "bear lockdown". I thought I had shut our garage door when we left but apparently the door hung up slightly on my car bumper leaving a small gap- big enough for Mama bear and two cubs to pry the door up. The bears held Pete at bay for two hours in our driveway while our dog Otter barked at them from inside the house. After the bears ate most of our winter birdseed they finally moved into our neighbor's garage for more fun/antics. For a full week, the bears came around every night to see if they could score more birdseed. I early anticipate the date that these bears will hibernate because they have been very bold and troublesome all summer.

Sun, Aug 23: Lee's Ferry Rigging day

Keith, Ava and I arrived at the Page airport with perfect timing to pick up Dana after loading up Anne Pierce's cooler with the Chevron solid ice blocks/dry ice and picking up the last fresh veggies for our trip at the Page Safeway. Our group converged at Lee's Ferry with the Crockett "boys" showing up after dark. Rigging was relatively easy (including ranger required gear check) and done in a few hours. The new shade pavilion at the put-in is a great addition. The weather seems mild (not too hot at all). In fact, many of us note that this entire trip is not too hot compared to most August trips and we experience no defined typical August monsoons this trip. After rigging our boats and gear, we enjoyed a group dinner at Marble Canyon Lodge (appreciating the unusually great service). We thanked Anne for taking on the permit holder/trip leader burden on this trip by giving her a mushroom anchor, "mini-skirt" and dipstick to enjoy while on the river. We are ready to launch early tomorrow.



Day 1, Mon Aug 24: Mile 20 camp

The ranger gives us a quick briefing and we launch early. The water is clear and stays clear for most of our trip. Very unusual for this month, I have never seen the river clear all the way down to Diamond on any other August trip. The Paria River is barely flowing so we float down to our first rapid with crystal clear green water. Badger Creek Rapid is an easy drop, and the entire group runs the first big rapid easily. We find a lunch spot and then run the big splashy waves in Soap Creek Rapid. I make a hard right pull to miss the holes in

House Rock Rapid- not everyone successfully completes a similar Grand Canyon downstream ferry, but some will catch on later in the trip.







Rick is the hairball boater on our trip and barrels down the middle of every rapid from here on out. Sometimes sideways, it seems like he is determined to flip (never does). I am surprised when he does NOT run the ledge hole in Lava Falls Rapid. I thought for sure he would run the ledge hole on purpose. The group struggles to make 20 miles today. Everyone is very tired and our cook crew (Anne Pierce, Dana, and I) prepare a quick dinner for the group. Our camp is at Mile 20 tonight, across from original intended camp North Canyon (taken by outfitter ahead of us). Today was a full day of pork (ham at lunch & pork chops for dinner). Our pork theme started by accident earlier this summer on our Yampa River trip and continues this trip. I sleep on the boat most nights if the eddy does not “rock & roll” too much. Tonight's eddy is calm and quiet. A beaver slipped upstream through our camp eddy and I fell asleep quickly.

Day 2, Tue Aug 25: South Canyon

We have a short day today (only 12 miles) with our first stop directly across the river at North Canyon. All the side canyons look very dry and undisturbed by any recent rain events. Tiny jumping frogs hop everywhere in North Canyon. We run the series of Roaring 20's Rapids and include a stop to check out the cave below Cave Springs rapid. Silver Grotto is our lunch and slithering spot. The pool below Silver Grotto is as low as I have

ever seen it. Most of our group clambers up the slick limestone wall with the help of a rope set in place by Ron. I see several Big Horn sheep and Blue Herons today.



We camp at South Canyon which I will always remember fondly from our 2008 Dave & Patti wedding camp. Some of us hike up to the Anasazi ruins, petroglyphs, and Indiana Jones cave while Keith and Ava prepare a birthday feast. My birthday is Sept 6 but several of our group just celebrated their birthdays earlier this month. We decided to make tonight our group birthday celebration evening. Keith and Ava prepare a delicious filet mignon feast finished off with a delectable chocolate/raspberry birthday cake. Dave Christiansen and Mike Sims complete a

perfect birthday evening by pulling out their guitars. We are treated to great music and we sing (or in my case hum) along to familiar songs (John Denver songs were my favorite).



Ringtail Cats are out in full force on this night (and many future nights) and boldly stride under my cot while I attempt to sleep. I feel the ringtail cat's tail brush up against my sleeping bag and I hiss at them to go away. They ignore me. Anne Pierce tells us later that they circle around her head all night while she sleeps directly on the beach. One Ringtail Cat brushes Anne's face with its tail (at Bass camp later in our trip). A motor rig boatman tells us that Ringtail Cats like to lick the bare feet of boatmen (for a salty treat). The only thing that I can imagine that could be worse with this image is if they were to lick my face while I sleep! Ringtail Cats are nocturnal trash scavengers. I can still picture the face of a Ringtail Cat eyeballing my headlamp light while gnawing on a rib bone scavenged from trash in Dave Christiansen's boat (it happened at Bass camp). Yuck! I do not know how Nick and Anne Olsen can stand the splashing, rocking & rolling of the South Canyon eddy all night long on their boat bed but at least they are free of Ringtail Cat harassment for the duration.



Day 3, Wed Aug 26: Saddle Canyon

We leave South Canyon camp relatively late in the morning and immediately stop at Vasey's Paradise Waterfall and fill our empty drinking water containers (including a poison ivy dose for Nick). Fortunately, Nick avoids the poison ivy rash by quickly rinsing off the plant oils in the river. Right around the corner, we enjoy flipping the Frisbee and striking our favorite Anasazi poses at Redwall Cavern.



After a last stop at Nautiloid Canyon, we push down to Saddle Canyon. The group struggles to keep up with Keith, Dave Crockett and I and are too hot and tired to hike up Saddle Canyon when we arrive. Anne Pierce decides to lead the hike the next morning when it would be cooler. This decision has significant implications (adds an extra day above Phantom) which means that we will need to make up a day later in the trip when the flow is predicted to be quite a bit lower (steady 10,000 cfs). I notice that our group continues to struggle with pushing down river and launching by 8-8:30 am.

Every group is different and this one is not used to frequent boat checks (and pushing boats out) during the night (to avoid beaching). Keith and I are usually the only ones who have our boats floating in the river every morning. We have enough people to drag the boats back to the water every morning, but I think it is so much easier to keep an eye on the boats during the night. The mushroom anchors make this less of a chore and I use mine whenever the camp has a sandy bottom to help keep my boat further out in the current before I go to bed. The dam induced "tides" make sleeping deeply more of a challenge in the Grand. I prefer the lower Saddle camp (more of a beach) but am okay with the upper Saddle camp.





Day 4, Thu Aug 27: Carbon Canyon camp

The hikers return from their hike up Saddle Canyon by 10 am. Our next hike just a few miles downriver is up the steep and hot trail to Nankoweep Anasazi Granaries. It is hard to do these two hikes back-to-back. Lunch right after the Nankoweep granaries hike provided an energy recharge for the group.

- *What made Dana laugh, while hiking to Nankoweep Granaries in 115-degree heat:*
- *Dana: "Man, I feel stupid that I forgot my wide brimmed sombrero at home."*
- *Dave Crockett: "I feel stupid that I bothered to bathe this morning."*

The Little Colorado (LC) river pleasantly surprises me with glorious "clean" blue water. I have not seen the LC clear for twenty years since I almost always run the Grand Canyon in August. Most other years the LC varies from a light brown to chocolate pudding brown consistency- never clear. What a treat! Everyone enjoys a swim in the blue water. We float down to Carbon Canyon camp (nicer than Palisade's camp) just in time for shade. It is a short day but filled with hikes and stops.





Day 5, Fri Aug 28: Grapevine

A stop in the morning at Birthing Rock (above Tanner rapid) where we admire the petroglyphs. We do not notice that Rick has run up the trail ahead of us and he misses the petroglyphs thinking they are just around the next corner. As we trudge back to our boats, no one notices that Rick has not come back with us and we push off. Anne Pierce figures it out quickly and waits for Rick to come racing back to his boat. Rick continues his big “air” approach and runs the hole in Tanner, Unkar, Neville’s and Sockdolager Rapids. I sneak the big Sockdolager Rapid hole. Ron fell out of his boat in Nevill’s Rapid hole, hung on the side of his boat for quite a while before successfully clambering back into his boat. Everyone runs relatively conservatively in Hance Rapid (forgiving level at our flows). We stop at Unkar delta to explore Anasazi ruins and find pottery shards. Another new stop was Escalante Creek (dry) to explore the Y-shaped canyons that form this drainage. This was interesting but not exciting enough to stop again in the future. We arrived early at Grapevine camp where some of our group entertained themselves by rappelling down the overhanging cliffs. Rocks came raining down on Anne Pierce while she shot action photos.

Day 6, Sat Aug 29: Lower Schist

First stop after running Grapevine Rapid is Clear Creek canyon where we hiked up and over black rock to the cooling waterfall. As we leave, I notice the eddy into the entrance of Clear Creek looks small and surging, I am glad we decided to pull out above this tiny eddy.



Dave and Patti Wimmer mailed our group a care package to Phantom Ranch that included a singing birthday card for me, candy and best of all, tingly spa foot crème. Iced lemonade, postcards and t-shirts are popular items for sale. Nick and Anne's taco salad on the hot beach provided a perfect lunch. While at Phantom Ranch, we noticed the American flag at half-staff. It turns out that Senator Ted Kennedy had died after we launched 6 days ago. A hiker stopped me (and asked in Swedish) if I was from Sweden. He had noticed my Sverige hat and had studied at university in Stockholm (spoke Swedish & French) and was German. Small world! We talked a bit about his trip (and I explained ours to him) and he went on his way to complete a rim-to-rim hike going up to the North rim.

The Phantom Ranch thermometer recorded 116°F today, but we are all convinced that it is a "dry" heat. Last year about the same date, the thermometer registered 126°F. Today seems to be the hottest day on our entire trip this year but I bet most other days are at least in the 90's and some over 100°F. With our water supplies topped off and "chores" completed at Phantom Ranch we head down river to scout Horn Creek Rapid. The higher flows open the left side at Horn, and we run the rapid nicely.

Our next scout is Granite Rapid- I have a nice right run. Keith gets slammed too close to the right wall and ends up spinning around backwards but ends up okay.

















Finally, we scout Hermit Rapid (I sneak left) where most of our group runs down the center, either intentionally or unintentionally for big rides!















We arrive in Lower Schist camp late tonight after a long day of hikes, chores, and rapids. The group is tired but working quite efficiently as we set up and tear down camps. We enjoy a quiet night in camp. We joke about the “8 pm rule” but most of us struggle to stay up past 8 pm. The “rule” is that no one can go to bed before 8 pm. Nick usually does a time check around 7:30 pm wanting to know how many minutes he has until he can lay his head down and go to bed. The rest of us are not far behind his bedtime.

Day 7, Sun, Aug 30: Bass Camp

Crystal Rapid is first up, and we have our first flip (two flips back-to-back). David Christiansen and David Crockett both flipped one after another while unsuccessfully timing their Grand Canyon downstream ferry. Keith chased David Christiansen (Ben and boat) and I chased David Crockett (and boat). A few umbrellas lost and David Crockett’s upside-down boat sheared off one of his thole pins while scraping through the rock garden below Crystal. I got David Crockett in my boat, he secured his boat to my boat and I rowed them both into shore for the re-flipping. With help from our group, both of our flippers got their boats back upright with minimal fuss. David Crockett replaced his sheared thole pin with his spare thole pin. We were back on the river quickly where we successfully run the rest of the “Gem” rapids.







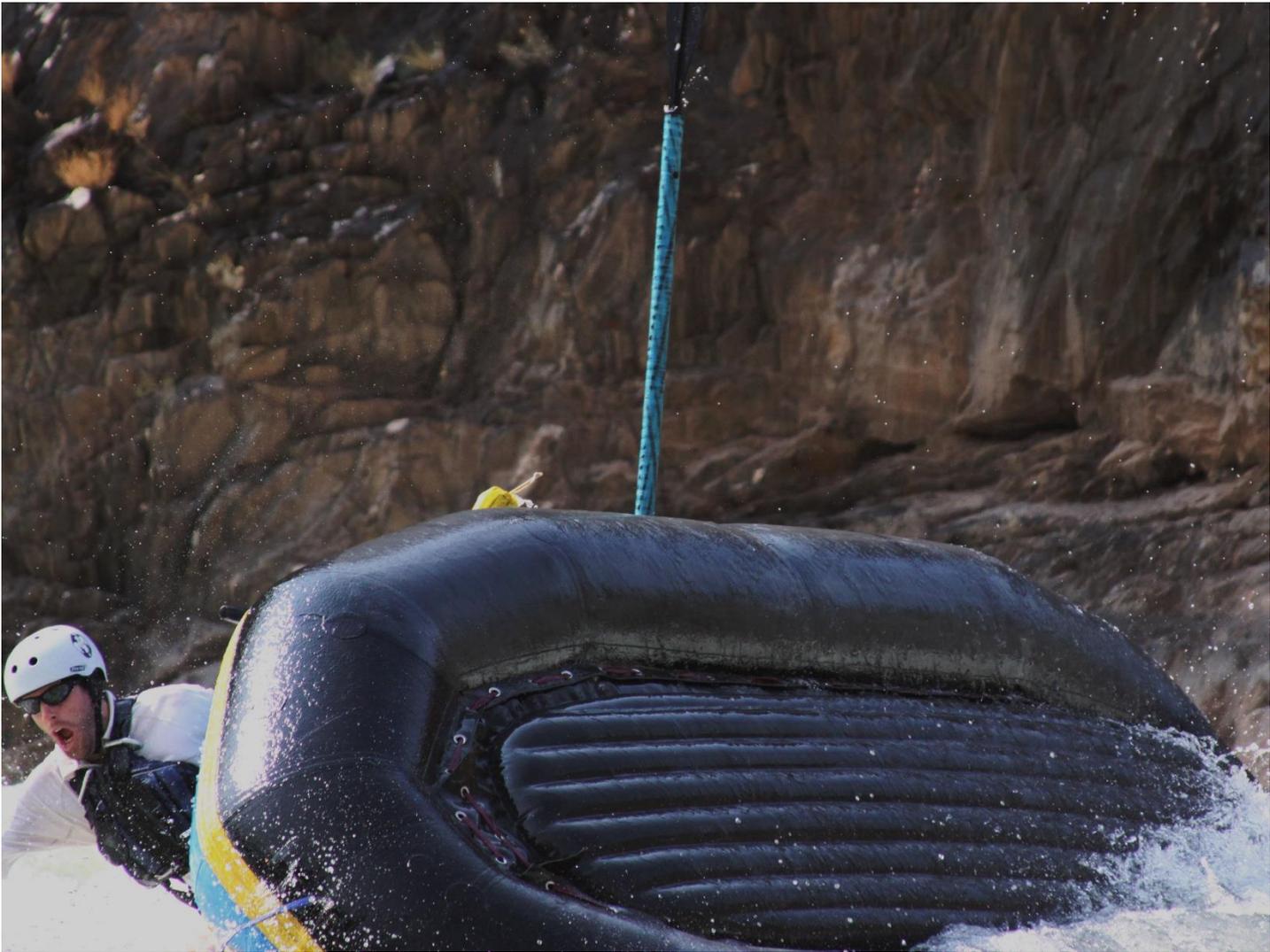


























A stop at the Ross Wheeler boat and then into Bass camp early. A Native American commercial training trip (motor rig) was on a long hike up Bass and we were shocked to see their melted Teva's when they returned to the beach. It is hot today, more than a "dry" heat?! One more umbrella is lost to the river during an unexpected severe wind gust. Dana handed out Shepherd's whistles and challenged us to learn how to make them work. Anne Olsen figured it out first. Lots of fun!

Around midnight, the Ringtail Cats drive me into a homicidal rage. I whack at David Christiansen's boat to chase them away from his rib trash. The Ringtail Cats crawl over my boat to get to his boat and I can hear them crawling all around me. This is very creepy. They are much bolder than in the past trips. After missing in my attempt to splat the Ringtail Cat, I felt remorse that I wanted to kill one (especially in a national park)! I decide to "live and let live" and do not whack at them again.

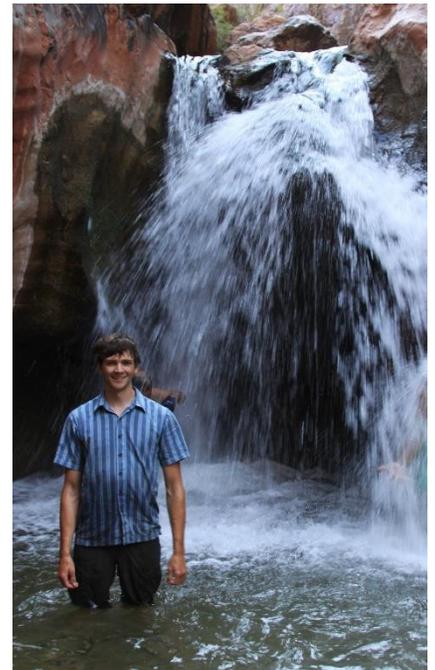
- *What made Dana laugh:*
- *While hiking up an inspirational side canyon:*
- *Dave Christiansen: "There's an ancient Tibetan proverb..."*

Day 8, Mon, Aug 31: Big Dune

Shinumo Creek Waterfall is our first early morning stop. Waltenburg Rapid is up next with a huge wave on the left. I run center right to avoid the meat of the rapid. Elves Chasm Waterfall is quiet and peaceful until we jump off the rock wall into the clear pool. I remain irrationally anxious when climbing down the enormous slick boulder on the Elves Chasm path and take a bit to



cross this tricky part of the trail. We have a short day and I do not even dip an oar in the water after we leave Elves Chasm waterfall. I am treated to a Big Horn ram that stands like a statue at river's edge watching me... watching him. His horn curl is huge, and I am impressed. Dana has my camera, but I do not need a photo to remember his pose. Despite my slow float to camp, we are all at Big Dune camp early and proceed to bake in the heat. Dinner is prepared early and by the time it gets dark we are ridiculously HOT. Ava and I go swimming right before we crawl into the boats for bed. Even then, the hot air dries us immediately.



Day 9, Tue, Sep 1: Stone Creek

Three minutes of silence at Blacktail Canyon is all our group can manage. We skip searching for fossils at Fossil Canyon and have lunch at Brain Rock. Specter Rapid lives up to the ominous name and on the dark right side, the monster waves give us a big ride. A stop at the Dollhouse above Bedrock Rapid ensures that our group understands the significance of pulling hard right at this rapid. Our last rapid before camp is Deubendorff (Dubie). Melissa sets up well but stops pulling too early and hits a big hole and flips. Fortunately, Rick manages a Herculean row to tow their raft into our Stone Creek camp eddy...upside down.

What made Melissa laugh:

- *Rick: (pulling our gazillion pound raft with extra beer and two boaters into the eddy below Deubendorff): Huff, puff, grunt, groan*
- *Mike: (delirious from having his thigh banged into a rock by the evil witch who flipped the boat in a hole disguised in the wave train) Hey, Rick, look at the cute little bird catching a ride on our upside down boat!*
- *Rick: Hey dude, can I look at the bird after I get your raft into the eddy?*

As we pulled into the eddy at Stone Creek, a friendly (and very tame) pair of camp birds make themselves comfortable on our boats. Maybe they hoped for a food handout (not). Mike and Melissa's boat was quickly re-flipped, and all was okay. Stone Creek camp allows our group to spread out and some hike up to upper Stone Creek canyon. The afternoon weather looked unsettled and quickly turned into a violent microburst rain and windstorm. Gear was flying everywhere. I had to chase my heavy dry bag when the wind blew it into the river. This meant that my tent began to fly away (without me in it weighting it down) so I threw my rescued dry bag onto my billowing tent to weight it down and helped gather other flying gear. Bill Crockett chased after his throw bag and Paco Pad (found it bobbing in an eddy quite a way down river). With Keith's parawing expertise, we had the kitchen area covered, chairs saved, and gear rescued just as the storm quieted down. At least the storm kept the flies away from camp that night. We were soaked but warmed up because the air temperature was warm. We worried a bit about the hikers (up Stone Creek) but checked the creek and were relieved to see only a bit of muddy water.

Day 10, Wed, Sep 2: Panchos Kitchen

The hikers split into two groups today. We topped off drinking water at Tapeats Creek and some of our loop hikers left us while the remainder of our group ran the boats down river. A stop at Christmas Tree cave and then down to Deer Creek Waterfall. We grabbed snack stuff for lunch, water and then climbed up to the Patio above the falls and then beyond to the Throne room. Wonderful day, everyone got to do their preferred activity.



The only negative to the day/trip was that we had a [foot tolio outbreak](#) affect several members of our group. Lyle is virtually crippled by the raw flesh on the bottom of his feet. Several others in our group will also suffer from foot ailments including Tolio, blisters, broken toe, and sunburn by the end of our trip. I stress the importance of clean dry feet in camp. I do not know exactly why some people get tolio and others do not, but I have managed to avoid it by doing the following:

- I wear short cotton socks during the day with my Chaco's (also prevents sunburn and blisters)
- At night I make sure to clean my feet with antibacterial soap, lather with lotion (Olsen's swear by bag balm), spray with Tinactin (athlete's foot spray) then I put on clean dry cotton socks to sleep in overnight.
- My feet wind up looking and feeling great at the end of every Grand trip if I stick to this practice every night.
- For some reason, I do not need to follow this routine on cold mountain rivers like the Middle Fork, etc.... Must be something to do with the hot/cold/dry/muddiness combination of conditions that exist in the Grand.

After the exhausted loop hikers meet up with us at the Deer Creek patio area a few stay behind to slither down Ron's rope line into the depths of the Deer Creek slot canyon area. The rest of us meander down to the

waiting boats and float down to camp. We make sure to talk to the outfitters before we leave to make sure everyone gets the camps that they want.

After dark, a motor rig boatman strolled up to our camp seeking a “client/guest break” and told us some funny stories (most sounded strange but true). I think he was disappointed that we are a mellow group but did share with us a particularly funny story. Here is his story: *He hides on the outskirts of camp after dark and squirts “guests” with a water gun if they attempt to urinate any place other than into the river. The guides swear they can spot the “problem” guests who will cheat the first day they are on the river. The guides tell guests that they will do this as part of their pre-launch orientation, so it is not a complete surprise. Quite clever I thought.*

The river has reached the predicted low flow stage today (10,000 cfs) and will not come back up the rest of the trip. It is strange but nice to have a steady flow. We do not worry about the boats being beached anymore.

Day 11, Thu, Sep 3: Anniversary at Matkat Hotel

Today is our (Pete and I) 21st wedding anniversary and I miss Pete. I wish he were here with us. We start the day early but stop at Olo and allow a commercial oar/kayak support trip to pass us. We wait a long time for them to clear out of Matkatamiba Canyon. This commercial group is supporting 20 kayakers with 5 rafts! Other than club trips on the Arkansas I have never seen this many kayaks on a trip together. They look like a confused brightly colored flock of goslings going down river. They are young and do not know each other. It appears that this is a training trip put together by the outfitter. Lyle told the commercial group about his foot tolio (he is unable to hike anymore) and they end up leaving him some unlabeled medicine at our Matkat Hotel camp. It looks like Betadine to me, and I am not so sure it helps Lyle and Bill’s feet enough, but I guess it is better than doing nothing. The rest of us hiked up Matkat and created a spectacular butt dam (with Rick’s civil engineering consulting) while a Big Horn ewe calmly eyed our antics from her rock perch. A short float to Matkat Hotel camp where Nick and Anne Olsen prepared a special anniversary cherry cheesecake dessert tonight. Delicious!

Day 12, Fri, Sep 4: Havasu and National Canyon

We start off with great runs in Upset Rapid with some runs more spectacular than others. Either way, it was exciting with no flips. I ran far right and missed the hole by a wide margin (compared to my hiccup last year). Then we enjoyed a quiet row down to Havasu Canyon where most of the group spent a few hours hiking. Havasu is clear this year, an appreciated change from the usual August flashflood issues we worry about at this side canyon. Lyle kept me company in my boat (and kept his Tolio feet dry) while we shared a floating lunch with Keith. I have never NOT pushed down to National Canyon camp but did not want to jump camp, so we enjoyed the lazy afternoon float down river to camp. After setting up camp and our camera battery solar chargers, Keith and I wandered up National canyon enjoying the quiet and shade. Lyle was able to rest his raw feet and enjoy some quiet time of his own.



Oracle Rock is perched high and dry which means we will be running right at Lava Falls Rapid tomorrow. A violent thunder/rainstorm in the middle of the night started a mad-cap race to set up our tents. I think I was the first one to notice the oncoming storm after “seeing” the lightning through my closed eyelids. It took Dana and Mike forever to figure out the storm was coming but as the rain began splattering down, they got their tent up in record time! What a show. I am glad to be sheltered in my tent tonight during the downpour.

Day 13, Sat, Sep 5: Hualapai Acres & LAVA Falls Rapid

Lava Falls Rapid Day is here. We push down river to scout early but still cannot escape the heat of the day. No one has an appetite to eat lunch before running the rapid. The commercial group (5 rafts & 20+ kayaks) and our group arrive at the scout together and we enjoy watching their runs through the rapid. It is finally our turn! Anne Pierce, Keith, and I run as a small subset of our group while the rest of our group watched and took photos. I had a perfect run on the right side of Lava Falls Rapid (good drop and straight). Keith went backwards on purpose and had a nice run along with Anne. The rest of our group begins to come through (a few at a time). Dave Christiansen had an unfortunate line on the final big crashing wave and flips at the bottom of Lava Falls Rapid. We got the Christiansen’s quickly after a bit of tugging to get Ben in my boat. Quite funny in hindsight and Ben forgives me once he figures out, I am really trying to help him get in my boat.

Here is how Ben describes it in his cleaned-up version:

- *Christina shouting: "Ben...Let go of your raft and swim over to me".*
- *Ben (thinking): "I'd rather keep hanging on to this raft."*
- *Christina: "Let go and swim."*
- *Ben: "OK"*

- *Ben makes the swim and struggles to get into Christina's raft with her help. Unknown to him but noticed by Christina, his PFD river knife holster is tangled in the rigging.*
- *Christina pushes Ben back down into the water while he struggles against her to get on the raft.*
- *Ben later reflecting on the situation: "All I could think of was, 'let me in this raft, you evil witch!'"*

After I get Ben's river knife holster unhooked, I finally get Ben in my boat. Anne Pierce and I just barely manage to successfully push the upside-down Christiansen boat into the right eddy just below Lava Falls Rapid. Their boat is flipped back upright, and we moved on down river after they caught their breath. This is David Christiansen's second flip; we are convinced it is tied to their assigned cooking days. His first flip was at Crystal and their cook day. They had even switched with another cook crew, so we are certain that cooking leads to flipping in this family.

We pass up open Whitmore Wash camp/pictographs to push on down river and get in some river miles. A relatively short mileage day today but we still arrive at camp late. Hualapai Acres is not a great camp. It has a steep beach face, but the timing is right. The group is very tired and our adrenaline rush from Lava Falls is long gone. Fortunately, the storms abate (for a bit) and we all regale each other with Lava Falls Rapid stories. Tents went up again tonight based on threatening storms which thankfully do not materialize.







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Day 14, Sun, Sep 6: My Birthday, Mile 224 camp (30-mile day)

Today we pay the price for the extra day above Phantom Ranch. We need to row at least 30 miles today. Camps are few/far between until we get to ~ mile 220. The low flow does not help matters much, but we make steady progress with stops at Jump rock and Womb Rock.

We arrive at Mile 224 camp late in the afternoon. Even later we see one boat from the commercial group we have been leapfrogging with since Deer Creek push by us making quick time with only a couple of clients in the single raft. When we see them at the takeout the next morning, we find out the rest of the story. One of their male guests had a prostate issue and had not been able to urinate for more than 24 hours. They decided to use their satellite phone to call in medical help to the Diamond Creek takeout and get him medical attention as quickly as possible without calling in a helicopter evacuation.

Our last night is wonderful and my boat is almost de-rigged. We have no more rapids and only four straps hold everything together to make it easier to derig tomorrow. We celebrate a perfect end to my actual birthday day! The girls in our group enjoy a relaxing spa evening. We smear Patti's gift of tingly spa cream on our feet and gently lay Ava's invigorating face masks over our warm faces. We look kooky but feel heavenly. The moon has been beaming brightly every night for the past week and tonight's evening seems as "bright as day". I sleep well.

Day 15, Mon, Sep 7, 2009: Labor Day and Takeout

We labor today! We wake up early and float the last 30 minutes to the takeout. The Hualapai do not want us at the takeout until they are done launching their day trips from the same area. We wait in the eddy and for a signal from the Hualapai that one of us can come on down and begin derigging. I am the first one in and when I am done, I ask permission to signal Keith in so he can begin derigging. The Hualapai say okay, and I use Dana's gift - my Shepherd's whistle to signal Keith down to the takeout. The Hualapai heard my shepherd's whistle and were very intrigued. I told them all about it and one young man told me that he had a homemade whistle like this when he was a child. Once we got the conversation going, I asked if our entire group could come down at once and he said sure. Amazing that a small connection made about whistles could make such a difference and they allowed us to bypass the "one boat at a time rule" (before 9 am). The takeout is hot and sweaty (like usual), but we are derigged and ready when Canyon REO arrives to pull us out. We did not beat our personal best of one hour (for an entire group) but managed to pull off our entire group derigging process in one hour 15 minutes. Not bad for our well-oiled machine of a group! We cruise back to Flagstaff with a lunch stop at Delgadillo's and more unloading/loading into our own vehicles. A long day. I think the quotes below capture my sentiments and appreciation we had for the Grand Canyon and each other. A great trip!

Lyle Hancock: "This was truly a successful trip... everyone did their share of the work and we all pulled together to keep the group safe and comfortable. We enjoyed a wonderful adventure in an incredibly special place. Thanks to everyone for making it happen."

Bill Crockett: "Thanks again for all of your help and guidance in the Canyon. I doubt that I will ever again have the privilege of being part of a trip that was as much fun, well led and run as smoothly as this one."

Dave Christiansen: "I was very blessed to be with people who knew the Canyon, had the necessary group gear, and the expertise to run a smooth trip for fifteen days. I appreciate that there was so much knowledge and resources within our group to move sixteen people 225 miles virtually without incident. Thanks to all for the cooperative effort needed to run the river with great people, great food, and safety throughout. This was an amazing experience for me and one I will not forget. I enjoyed the river with all of you."

Dana Eriksen: "Thanks for a wonderful trip! I am grateful for the time spent with each of you. The memories of our journey together will last a lifetime."

Melissa Broch: "Thanks to everyone for a fabulous trip. It was great floating with you all, thanks for making us so welcome in the group. Hope to see you all on a river nearby or far away soon! "

Anne Pierce: "First I want to say thank you all so much for making this such an enjoyable and memorable trip. I really appreciated the enthusiasm everyone had for the canyon, and the way everyone pulled together to get the work done smoothly. I couldn't have asked for a better cast of characters to spend two weeks with at the bottom of a canyon."



