

## Pikes Peak River Runners

### **Grand Oar Donations Plus Some Swim and Dive Team Antics August 2023**



*By Christina King*

*Photo credits: Everyone Listed below + Michael Mauldin  
Grand Canyon on the Colorado River in Arizona, Aug 6-20, 2023*

Participants: 16

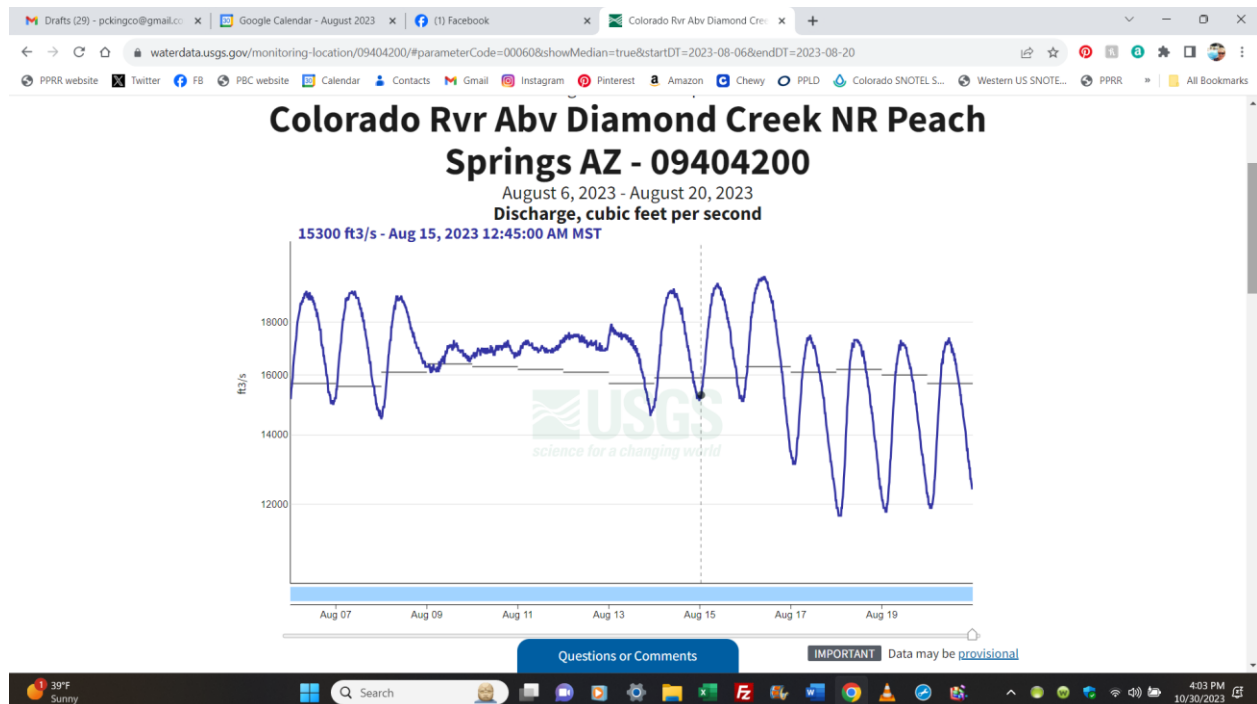
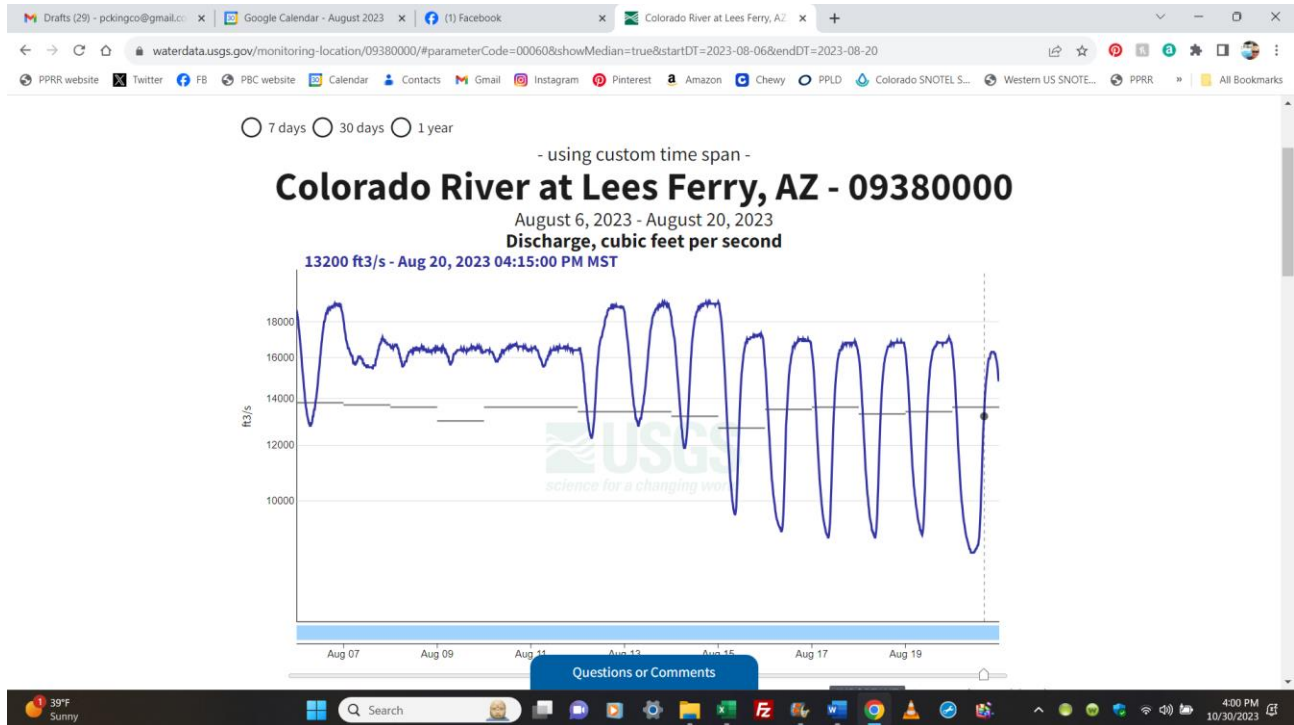
- Anna Smith (permit holder- on the wait list since a baby/1997) & Dad Ted Smith
- Christina King
- Patti Meyer
- Chris & Fran Cremer
- Maddie Cremer
- Zac & Cara Cremer
- Brendan Toft
- Abbey Cremer & Hunter Drabik
- Shellie Haaland
- Jeff & Shelly Steeger
- Jennifer Strange
- 10 rafts/cats assortments, many bimini's and LOTS of gear!



*And new + 2 tagalong friends we met on the river below: Tom Randgaard and Jess Rodin*



**Flows:** We had a variety of good flows falling mostly between 11,000 cfs to 19,000 cfs. The graphs below illustrate the Bureau of Reclamations prerogative to adjust flows at their whim (see ~Aug 7-12, flat line in the graphs). It was noticed when I was trying to guess which way the water was going to go overnight. The Little Colorado and Havasu contributed quite a bit of higher flows below these confluences so I am fairly sure we never saw the lower 9,000 flows. Monsoons were very active and more unpredictable than usual. I am used to the afternoon buildup, downpour and then dissipating. This time, it was hard to predict if it would rain in the middle of the night or morning. Our trip temperatures were relatively mild for this time of year, which was nice for our cooler management. Rare in my experience for this time of year. In addition, our last day on the river was caught up in the drama of Hurricane Hilary (more details about that on Day 15/16).





**Aug 4, 2023 (Drive over to Durango):** Departed from our various western home states but most of the group was from Colorado (others from MA, MT & UT). Anna Smith the permit holder had been on the original wait list since she was born in 1997, more than 25 years ago! Her permit finally came up and we were so lucky to have been invited on this magical river trip. I have boated with Anna's father (Ted Smith) since before he was married to Kelly and before Anna was born. Needless to say, we have known each other for a long time! Patti and I rigged up at our Colorado home, stopped at [Riff Raff Brewery](#) in Pagosa Springs and spent the night with our favorite boating family in Durango before pushing on to Lee's Ferry the next day.



**Aug 5, 2023 (Arrive at Lee's Ferry to Rig & spend night at Marble Canyon Lodge):** This is always a longer day than anticipated. We stopped for a brewery lunch in Page, AZ and then continued to Lee's Ferry. Marble Canyon Lodge is definitely undergoing significant change (ie remodeling and expansion and [new owners](#)). I expect in a few years that Marble will be quite the "resort". I love the new rooms! But prices are already bouncing up quite high and I expect them to go higher. Rumor of a swimming pool going in as well. Today's highlight was that the new NPS Lee's Ferry Ranger Jen Hogan checked us out today before our launch tomorrow. So much time saved! Plus, Ranger Jen is fabulous. She did not repeat the information in the regs/videos but instead focused on communication on the river, bats (rabies), pushing the SOS button on our Garmin and some of the more nuanced issues in camp, such as smashing cans below the high water line so ants do not infest the beaches from the sticky drips from empty soda/beer cans. Ranger Jen is a "keeper" for sure. We enjoyed a late dinner in the lodge and trundled off to bed tired and sweaty from the day's boat rigging. Why do we bring so much stuff! Lots of bimini's in our flotilla. We met a fun couple (Tom and Jess) solo boating at Lee's, launching same day as us. Turns out we end up hopscotching with them most of our trip. Either they adopted us or we adopted them. Either way, a very enjoyable couple.

**Day 1, Aug 6, 2023 (Launch Day!), Soap Creek camp Mile 11:** Despite our early checkout yesterday we struggle to get off the ramp before 11 am. Next time I think we should meet at 8 am, leave by 9 am. Paria is flowing muddy. We see a Condor with outspread wings resting on a ledge river right just above Navajo bridge. It is hot and windy today. Badger Creek rapid is easy read/run. The group struggles to make more than 11 miles so we settled for Soap Creek camp. I was hoping to get below House Rock rapid as it is easier at higher water but our late start precludes that idea. The first day is typically the hardest (probably because we have not gotten into a routine yet such as rigging, shuttles, etc...). However, we are rewarded by seeing two more Condor's flying from river left South rim area at camp. Dinner is quick and early and Anna asks if it is 8 pm yet so she can go to bed! We joke that so many of our trips want to go to bed before 8 pm that we might have to create a rule that you have to stay up at least until 8 pm. Lastly, Shelly Steeger ends up leaving her phone in camp and gets it returned after the trip is over from a super nice boater who found it a few days later.

**Day 2, Aug 7, 2023 Sandpile Camp, Mile 31:** Our first rapid of the day is House Rock rapid. I think most everyone had good runs and Jennifer Strange's run is particularly exciting. I did a Grand Canyon ferry left to right to avoid the big hole at the bottom center/left. First stop of the day is North Canyon, the sand beach is back! Great camp again. This is a nice walk up a lovely side canyon, perfect for our group to stop for lunch. Our next series of rapids were the Roaring 20's and they give us plenty of excitement. Abbey Cremer (boyfriend Hunter passenger) both got swept off their raft in 21 mile rapid. Boat stayed upright and they performed a quick self-rescue and were back on the boat rowing downriver in no time. Jennifer Strange got swept off her cat in 24 ½ rapid and injured her wrist. She also self-rescued but ended up with purple bruises on her torso. Lastly, Tom and Jess (our group adoptees) had a similar issue in 24 ½ rapid with Tom swimming and losing his entire oarlock and oar. Fortunately, Jeff Steeger found their oar lock/oar just a bit below and all was good. Patti surfed unexpectedly in Georgie's rapid. Needless to say the Roaring 20's were spicy today. Hunter gave Jennifer a much appreciated break from rowing with her bruised wrist. We stopped at Cave Springs for a quick look-see. Silver Grotto camp (group already there) and South Canyon camp (motor rig) were both taken so we bailed out at Sandpile camp. It was sandy but small. I have never camped here before but glad we got it so we could enjoy our planned stops tomorrow. Tougher than normal 20 miles today. We did experience Beatlemania tonight. Some small black bugs hatched and got into everywhere, I have never seen them before. Not sure what they were. They might have been [Darkling beetles](#). They did not bite but did get into our hair, tents, clothes, ears, mouths, etc...

**Day 3, Aug 8, 2023 Main Nankoweep Camp, Mile 53:** Wind started at 9:30 am today, ugh...Stops included South Canyon, views of Stanton's cave & Vasey's paradise waterfall, Redwall Cavern, passed by my nemesis Nautiloid Canyon (aka [broken leg canyon](#)) and Marble Canyon dam site. Lunched at Buck Farm (mile 41), group asked if we could camp there. We had only gone 10 miles, so I said okay BUT that means we have to make up the miles later on the trip. We pushed on downriver. It was a row slog past President Harding rapid to make it to Nankoweep camp. Tom and Jess were waiting for us and shifted down river to their camp below. 22 miles today. A few folks went up to the Nankoweep granaries before dark and hiked down with flashlights. Jennifer went up the next morning. Everyone was tired and sore today. We still have a hard time getting launched before 9:30 am each morning.

**Day 4, Aug 9, 2023 Upper Rattlesnake Camp, Mile 75:** I think we decided today as a group to pre-pack lunches and eat on our boats to allow for more river time. Little Colorado was running clear and sky blue. I have not seen it this way in decades. Such a special treat! Usually in August it is running brown with monsoon showers. Quite a few of our group enjoyed walking up and floating down in the blue water. Saw some humpback chubs fish shadows at the confluence. Pleasant temperatures today with shady clouds. Ran Tanner rapid and stopped at Unkar Anasazi ruins for a walkabout. 22 mile day again. Anna's shins are sunburnt! Ouch. Rain and storms in camp and overnight.

**Day 5, Aug 10, 2023 Trinity Camp, Mile 92:** Awoke to rain and storms this morning. Cleared up a bit and we got on the river. Arrive for our scout at Hance rapid and it looks as difficult as usual. This is one of the trickier rapids, you cannot just set up and steer. You have to drop in on your line and row across big water to avoid monster holes scattered about the rapid (ie Land of the Giants). Our group had a wide variety of entrances and runs. We all had a similar "plan" but not all executed it. I think a few entries either went right of entry hole or into the entry hole. I rowed my plan; left of right entry hole, then across the duck pond but not too far one way or the other to avoid holes in the Land of the Giants. I did stall out in one hole but my cataraft managed to continue forward after a brief hold. Abbey entered too far right and flipped in the first top holes on river right. A LONG unpleasant swim. Collected Abbey, Hunter and raft but not until below Son of Hance (rapid around the left corner below). Abbey lost both oars to the river (forever) and had to run rest of the trip with her two spare oars. Cara took over rowing Abbey's raft today after this flip to give her a rest. Photos (obtained on the internet) below illustrate this rapid.





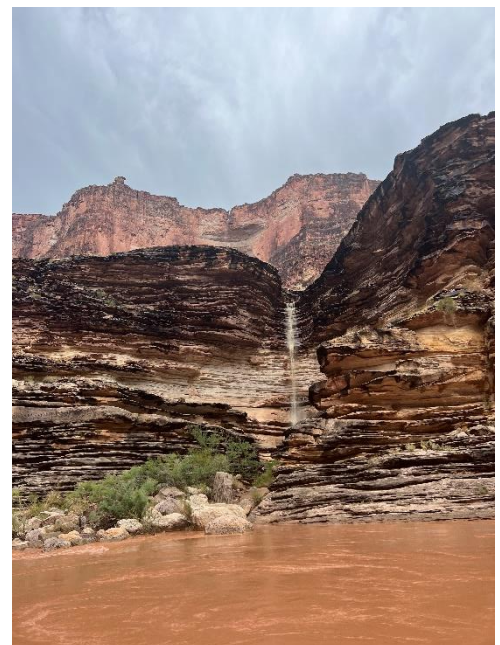
After this difficult flip in Hance the group wanted to scout Sockdolager and Grapevine rapids (but there are no good scouts) so they had to trust the lead boats to set the runs. They were easy to boat scout. Sockdolager was a left run to avoid huge hole on right, Grapevine was just the opposite, right run to avoid huge hole on left. Jeff

looks like he had a close call in Grapevine and hit a big hole but all ended well. We stopped at Phantom Ranch to refill water jugs and trudge up to the ranch to get a cold lemonade and mail pre-written postcards. Mild temps all day with some rain. Horn Creek rapid was next up and I made a tactical error in eddying out too low and was unable to “talk” to rest of group what my run would be. They were too far up the cliff for me to reach/communicate with while scouting. So, we ran in two groups while they watched. Note to self, next time eddy out further up so all boats are together for communication purposes. I ran left of the Horn (ie split the horns) for an easy drop and stayed left afterwards. If you have not run Horn Creek rapid before it is not an easy read from the shore. Did not get to Trinity camp until 5 pm. Poured rain during dinner and afterwards. Rolled up in my tarp like a burrito until midnight and it stopped raining. Nice to dry out until morning.

**Day 6, Aug 11, 2023 New Shady Grove Camp, Mile 103:** Woke up to cloudy skies this morning after a rainy night. Granite rapid is first up today. We run in two groups, Shellie Haaland flips behind me in Granite rapid and floats with her boat into the endless eddy river right. Patti and I slip into the eddy to help her. Around and around we go for 2-3 hours trying many types of boat rescue attempts to get Shellie’s boat secured and re-flipped. The rest of the group is down river out of reach or at the rock island below the rapid. Long story short, we luckily get Shellie and her upside down cataraft tied up to shore at bottom of eddy. But are unable to flip it back over with just 3 of us. Brendan, Cara and Jeff paddled up to help us and we flip it back over. It takes 6 of us to flip it back over. We are spent! Shellie lost one oar, I got her other oar secured. During this entire process I manage to pull a left chest muscle which is very painful with any movement and bruised my knee on a rock. Many others have some nice bruises as well. Rescue Hindsight: The only attempt we did not try was to tie Shellie’s upside down cat to BOTH Patti and my boats (in front) and then tie Patti and my boats together (parallel). At that point, Patti and I could have each taken an oar and rowed us all out as one unit. Plan @#\$%\$#! was to flag down a motor rig for help that enjoyed our adventures while having lunch at Granite beach. The motor rig came down when it was all over.

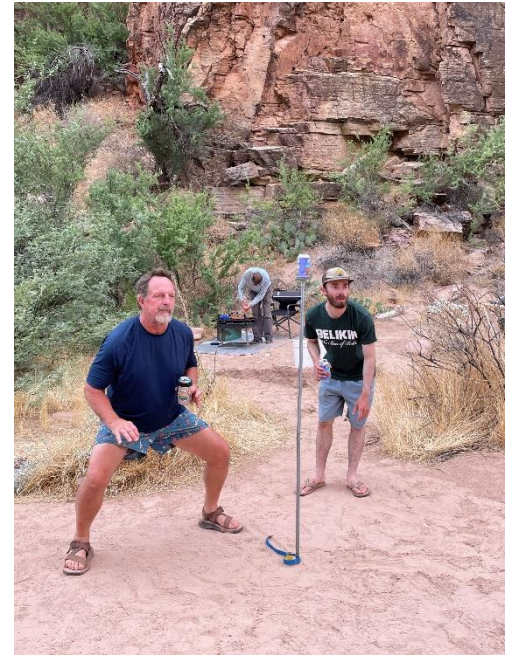
After all this, we arrive at Hermit rapid. We scout, I run up front and flip in the 10<sup>th</sup> wave that surged up under me. Despite hitting it straight and pushing I felt my cataraft slip backwards and then flip. Jeff got my upside down cataraft quickly, Ted and Anna picked me up and the boat was flipped back over quickly. No damage, no oars/equipment lost. I did bruise my thigh during the re-flip and now have a sore left chest, left thigh and right knee. We get back on track, scout and run Crystal rapid on the right- all had good runs. We run ½ of the Gem series rapids and then emergency camp at New Shady Grove because of timing. Small eroded camp. What a day! We only run 11 miles today but I am exhausted after the Granite rescue and my flip in Hermit.

**Day 7, Aug 12, 2023 Big Dune (aka 119.1) Camp, Mile 119:** Our first stop today is Shinumo Creek waterfall, our 10 boats fill the eddy tight. We stop at Elves Chasm which has been severely eroded from flash floods. Elves Chasm eddy has room for ~ 4 boats. We have to stop the rest of our boats above and the rest of our group scampers on cliffs to get down to canyon trail. Storms threaten and then crash down. We watch from safe cliff overhangs as the creek flash floods. Cliff waterfalls spring to life and hail comes crashing down. I am cold but glad to be under a cliff wall for protection. Quite spectacular and glad we are all safe. After the storm we float down to camp at mile 119 camp on river right. It turns out that I have called this camp Big Dune for decades, because it has a “big dune”. I had no idea I have been mis-naming this camp for years. We parawing to protect the kitchen and hang out on this lovely big dune. Laundry and clean up day for me. Nice to spread out my damp stuff to dry on the warm rock ledges. 13 miles today. My chest even hurts when I breath. This chest pull is very painful. Some beached boats the next morning.





**Day 8, Aug 13, 2023 Stone Creek Camp, Mile 132:** Blacktail canyon is our first relaxing stop of the day. I love this canyon, so quiet and beautiful. The rock formations are spectacular. Our next rapid of consequence is Spector. Jeff and Shelly get swept off their raft but are okay. We scout Bedrock rapid and ½ of group checks out the dollhouse rock formation at the scout. We run together and all make the right run. Deubendorf rapid is our last scout/rapid of the day. While scouting, Zac finds a huge Big Horn Sheep skull on the path. I flipped here last time and do not properly admire the skull. I do not make the same entry mistake and plan a more conservative run and nail it. Right side of entry lateral and slipped by all the big holes. Stone Creek camp was wide open so we pulled into the big beach and set up camp. Stone Creek falls provided a nice warm shower. The river went down overnight and all our boats were beached. Lots of yanking, sliding and pulling the next morning. FYI: the “easiest” way to drag beached boats to the river is the following. Use buckets of river water to help create a slip and slide scenario of water soaking at the end farthest from the river. Get as many people as possible on each side and keep wetting down the path with buckets of river water. Heave ho, heave ho.....



**Day 9, Aug 14, 2023 Panchos Camp, Mile 137:** Tapeats creek is our last water refill stop. We treat with chlorine and bury those jugs in the boats to save for the end of our trip, if needed. We only plan 5 miles today as we want to spend most of the day at Deer Creek waterfall and canyon. We arrive at the mouth of Deer Creek and triple tie up to make room for other groups. The weather remains mild and everyone gets to enjoy whatever they want to do, jump in waterfall pool, hang out at the “patio”, enjoy the cliff views. Relaxing day. We re-join as a group and float down to Panchos sandy beach camp. Patti and I finish our second cook day and high five our hard work. Half the group is beached in the morning at this camp including Tom and Jess at the next camp below. We help them slip and slide to the water as well.

**Day 10, Aug 15, 2023 Matkat Motel Camp, Mile 149:** An easy float down to the mouth of Matkat where we all stage up to maximize the number of boats we can fit into the mouth of this narrow serpentine canyon. But alas, best laid plans are thwarted by another thunderstorm threat. The group scampers out quickly as this canyon is not as forgiving as Elves Chasm in regards to flash flooding. We arrive unexpectedly early at Matkat but have no desire to push down below as we will have to run Upset and have even less desirable camp options above Havasu. We have seen many Big Horn sheep the last few days. Tom and Jess joined us for dinner providing a tasty guacamole dip for an appetizer. 12 miles today.

**Day 11, Aug 16, 2023 Mile 160.5 Camp, Mile 161:** I check out the following camps today; Upset Hotel (bad), Upper Ledges (bad), Ledges (poor for our number of boats). Our first scout rapid is Upset. Very similar to House Rock rapid but more difficult to break through to the right side and I stall a bit when left tube hits far right side of the hole. I got a bit too close to the hole. Others were not so lucky. Abbey and Hunter flip again. Other boats hit the hole directly, some sideways, some cockeyed but all the others make it through upright. Ted fell out when he hit the hole but Anna hopped right on the oars to take over the raft. Ted floated over to the right side near a rock.

- [Upset Left Run](#)- I have never run this line, seems a bit tight & risky if you miscalculate
- [Upset Right Run](#) – my typical run

Havasu is our next stop with some in the group deciding to hang in the eddy. Water quality here and in Little Colorado is VERY poor. I do not step in it. I do ask the rest of the groups where they all plan to camp and it appears that most camps down river are taken or spoken for and even “double booked”. Jennifer misses the eddy so Shellie, Patti and I float down river to join her and keep her company while the rest of the group enjoys Havasu Creek. Rather than pushing too many miles for no reason I recommend we pull up short and camp at any acceptable camp above Tuckup Canyon. Mile 160.5 is it, not a great camp but serviceable. 12 miles today.



**Day 12, Aug 17, 2023 Tequila Beach Camp, Mile 180:** Today (Lava Falls rapid) day is always a tension-filled day. The group is very jittery and the day groover comes out a lot. I have a difficult time reading the group's emotions and figuring out how to settle them down. Abbey does not want to run Lava at all and wants her and Hunter to walk around it. They do not realize that this is difficult and we do not have a spare boatman stepping forward to run their raft through the rapid. Running the rapid twice for one boatman is unrealistic. The group seems to want to run the rapid the next day. But I remind them that we are now running into an issue of making miles from here on out that would be hard to make up. Of course at 11 am we run into a big storm, high winds, etc... that stops our forward progress completely. Sometimes you just have to let the river hold you back for an hour or so rather than wear yourself out trying to make one mile of rowing. I stop and try to tell the group to stop fighting against the wind but they do not understand what I am saying. Frustration is an all time high with those trying to force the rowing. We stop for a lunch break after storm blows over and the group appears exhausted. I ask and stop multiple times to figure out if they want to run Lava today or tomorrow. Ultimately, the group comes to a partial consensus that we will run it today, we row to scout beach. Abbey and Hunter ride in other boats and Cara runs their raft. Left side is a no-go, flow is too low. We all run right and have good runs. My run was a bit sloppy at the end when I got kicked left and only straightened up partially before hitting the last wave (which I high-sided). Ugly but salvageable run for me. Everyone is tired but happy below Lava Falls rapid and we stop at Tequila Beach and decide to camp there. Disco night tonight. Abbey and Hunter won the costume prize! We find out that Abbey proposed to Hunter back at Crystal rapid and



decided to let us know tonight. Congratulations! 19 miles today. Picture above on our approach to Lava Falls, taken by photographer Michael Mauldin on rim.

**Day 13, Aug 18, 2023 Parashant Camp, Mile 199:** Mild temps continue and we enjoy a downstream wind most of today- nice surprise. Easy float to camp, look for some fossils up Parashant wash. It rains all night and my tarp burrito feels like a sauna. 19 miles today.

**Day 14, Aug 19, 2023 Mile 223.2 Camp, Mile 223:** Anna rowed Mile 205 rapid and got a bit off track. Managed to bend bimini a bit, lost an oar and oarlock but no flip. Try to find the womb rock trail above Pumpkin hotsprings but cannot see it. Appears overgrown or washed away. Climbed up and jumped off Jump Rock (not me). Three Springs was dry! Bypassed Mile 220 camp which was open BUT beach face was steeply eroded which made it very unappealing from a loading/unloading perspective. This was a big mistake as all other options below us were taken other than a barely acceptable Mile 223.2 camp river right. Spit rain, storms threatening, “heard” from another group with text capability that Diamond was closed today due to washouts. Hurricane Hilary is bearing down and threatening our option to takeout at Diamond Creek tomorrow. All communications to Canyon REO (our shuttler) go unanswered. We finally reach spouses Pete and Kelly (in Colorado) and ensure that they tell Canyon REO that we plan to takeout at Diamond if it is open. Canyon REO wants us to row down to Pierce either way. Needless to say, we are frustrated. Chris’s knee that he scraped a few days ago is now very painful and inflamed. Long story short he went to hospital Aug 21 (for 4 days) and was admitted for a staph infection. 24 miles today.



**Day 15, Aug 20, 2023, Diamond Creek Takeout, Mile 226:** After communication with Canyon REO, we reach Diamond and it is open to outgoing trips only (that is us!). Canyon REO shows up hours behind, because they thought the road was closed, it was not. All other trips left including school bus and Hualapai rangers. Canyon REO finally showed up after our gear sat derigged and neatly piled into like items together. We got out just in time. Hurricane Hilary closed the Diamond Creek road that night and next day. Quite a frustrating end to a great trip.

**Notes from Tom & Jess who went down to Pearce Ferry:** Hello!! We made it and I survived the Grand Canyon! We finished 2 days early because of the lack of campsites. We stayed at the only 2 campsites past Diamond Creek.

*Day 15*

*Miles 214-243 / 29 miles*

*After we floated by you at the Diamond Creek takeout out we were successful running the last rapids of the trip. I had read about “fang” and saw the pictures in the book so I knew I would be happy once we got through it. We scouted it and you could barely see the “fang”.*

*We stopped at a few so called campsites that are marked in the book and on the campsite list from Jen Hogan the Ranger. Doesn’t look like many people camp this part of the river. You would think the rangers would update the campsite list if they are going down the river regularly. We ended up at 243 mile camp. There was one commercial group at the upper part of the 243 mile camp but there was a*

*nice campsite just down a bit. We had some rain again and a lot of wind.*

#### *Day 16*

*Miles 243-265 / 22 miles*

*When we were packing up we had some flies at the camp. This was the only time that I recall having flies. Pretty amazing. I got bit by more bugs in Minnesota playing pickleball after the trip! LOL I am so happy you all told us about the "island" because there were no campsites! Actually, there was one campsite from 243-280 and it was the island. The island had space for our 1 tent. We set up the tent and got the tarp on for expected rain. As we were sitting in our chairs drinking a beer a private group came floating about just before sunset. I think we surprised each other.*

#### *Day 17*

*Miles 265-280 / 15 miles*

*Since we did not find campsites we pushed through and finished our trip 2 days early. We got to Pearce Ferry about 1pm. We were able to get a message to our shuttle person. They were up at Lee's Ferry but said they could get the truck to us later that night. So we derigged on the ramp. The truck was delivered about 10pm so we loaded up the truck in the dark and finished about midnight. It was too late to drive out and we did not want to set up the tent so we slept in the truck. (After enjoying the air conditioning for a bit!) We were able to load the 217 lb raft into the truck, in the dark by ourselves! Woohoo! We also had a couple of guys show up to look at the river. They offered us ice cold water and beer.*

*It was a fabulous trip and very exhausting. It was such a pleasure meeting all of you and sharing this experience. I will be forever grateful for letting us tag along for the big rapids.*

#### **Post trip update:**

**Lost gear:** 5 oars- donated to the river gods, one returned by the gods,(ie Jeff) not too bad. One phone lost, but found and returned.

#### **Swim and Dive Team Results:**

- 4 flips: Hunter & Abbey 2x, Shellie, Christina
- 12 involuntary swims/dives:
  - Hunter and Abbey: 6 swims
  - Shellie: 1 swim
  - Christina: 1 swim
  - Ted: 1 swim
  - Jennifer: 1 swim
  - Jeff & Shelly: 2 swims
  - Injuries: quite a few bruises, 2 infections

#### **General Themes:**

- **What went well:** Communication, group dynamics, "big picture trip schedule strategy discussion", safety planning, good trip pace, scouting, attraction stops/hikes, review how day went, plan for next day, adjust to what groups wants to do (ie do they like camp games and sandy beaches, more hikes, less hikes, etc...), supportive group, communicating with other groups and looking at the NPS calendars (launches, exchanges, takeouts, etc...), be aware of storm situations ie flash flooding events.
- **Room for Improvement:** not all dry boxes are dry- replace rubber gaskets more often, use oar tethers, bring less stuff, better emergency contact/communication with shuttler, think about odd scenarios and how group would deal with them before the trip, more backup boatmen, less boats, how to manage a group when they get stuck in indecision or jittery, tighter boat formation (hard to do with 10 boats), set



group return times before hike, clean feet every night/lotion and wear socks to bed (we had Tollo outbreak with some folks in our group).

**Side Note:** I also came down with a staph leg infection on Aug 24 (4 days after we got off the river) with no symptoms until after I got off the river. Hospital stay for 4 days, most likely from dirty water in my leg from cleaning river gear in our driveway. I had no visible scratch or bug bite. But it was in the location of my thigh bruise I got 13 days before the infection showed up. Maybe I got dirty water in somewhere else and the old bruise was a “good host site” for an infection? Doctor’s did not have a definitive answer how I got it. BUT my PA used to work at the Grand Canyon South Rim clinic AND she saw this type of infection often from muddy river water. I have pics but they are too gross to share!