

Pikes Peak River Runners

Grand Canyon: Salty Snacks & Starshine August 2025



By Christina King

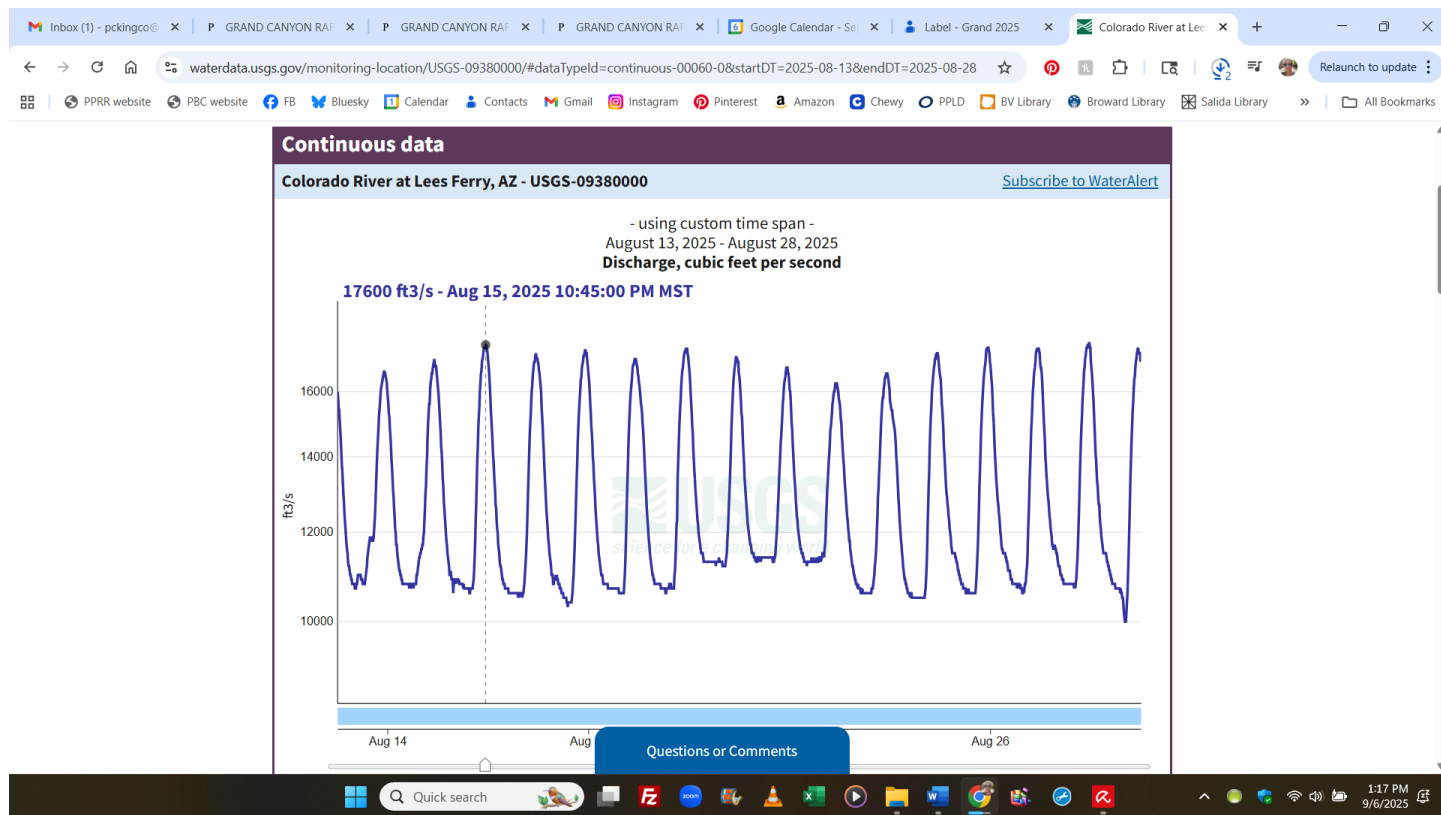
*Photo credits: Paul McDermott, Max Riehn, Debbie/Russ Long, & Sam Ozanich
Colorado River (Grand Canyon) in Arizona, **Aug 13-28, 2025**
16 Days, 1 layover, 226 miles, Lee's Ferry to Diamond Creek*

Participants: 16

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| 1. Paul McDermott (most organized permit holder) | 10. Kenji Hammon |
| 2. Keith Darby (Chef Extraordinaire) | 11. Eric Lamalfa |
| 3. Christina King (Trip Leader) | 12. Kay Makanoa |
| 4. Brian Mitchell | 13. Trish Cook-Cox |
| 5. Scott Holmberg | 14. Sam Ozanich |
| 6. Russ Long | 15. Max Riehn |
| 7. Deb Long | 16. Scott Walton |
| 8. Gabby Filter | 17. Wendy Leiber |
| 9. Kenji Hammon | 6 rafts, (Five 18' rented from Ceiba-whole shebang pkg) |



Flows: Flows ranged from 10,500 to 17,700 cfs, see graph below. Overall, the trip was not as hot as forecasted and we appreciated some cloud cover but no significant monsoonal moisture (ie no canyon rim waterfalls this trip).



Aug 10-12, 2025 (Pre-trip & Arrive in Flagstaff, Drive to Lee's Ferry: Departed from our various home states (Hawaii, Florida, Alabama, Idaho, Colorado, Utah & Montana) to arrive in Flagstaff with time to spare and do final pre-trip organizing. Paul M. our permit holder, and pre-trip organizer arrived with Max and all their photography equipment. Paul and Max planned this trip to include as many photography options as possible as they are professional photographers. We dropped off our personal gear at Ceiba (our gear provider/shuttler), enjoyed pizza out, packed and re-packed dry bags and bought drinks for the river. The morning before our launch we all met at Ceiba and began the process of prepping for our rigging day at Lee's Ferry. Ceiba was very thorough and had everything organized and ready to go. We left about 9 am straight to Lee's Ferry where the unloading/rigging process began. It was hot and as Ceiba says "if you are hot, you are stupid". The cold river provided quick dunks to cool off while Ceiba talked/showed us through their rigging process. The rigging went smoothly with a seamless Ranger Jen check-out at the end. Jen's push for "Salty Snacks" became our trip motto whenever folks started feeling a bit hot and cranky. Ranger Jen reminded us that trails are closed, Phantom Ranch evacuated and we can only stop to get water at the spigot at Phantom Ranch due to Dragon Fire on the North Rim. Paul M did a great job of screening our group of 16 boaters and I



can already tell we are asking the right questions, paying attention and working well together. Ceiba has been great to work with both before the trip and during the rigging. We finish rigging about 4 pm, float down to river camp and enjoy a tasty dinner of brisket and mac n cheese pre-prepared by Keith D. Keith proves to be quite the chef and could easily beat any cook show chef with his culinary skills. Best brisket I have ever tasted, so juicy and tender.

Eric and I had just met in person the day before and we were in our sleep over mode. We kept chatting like little school girls on the boat that night. Christina made a comment: "You two are talking quite a bit." We shut up and went to bed but not after seeing some of the craziest meteors of my life. I was surprised with how cold it got that night which was refreshing. I also named Russ Long Hippy Colonel tonight. -Kenji Hammon

"If you're hot, you're stupid." ... "I feel stupid." —The most popular quotes of the trip

Paul McDermott <https://www.pauliseverywhere.com/>

Max Riehn <https://www.maxsonmedia.com/ourteam/>

Ceiba <https://www.ceibaadventures.com/>

Day 1: Aug 13, Launch Day- Hot Na Na camp: (~16 miles)

Our first 10 miles cranked out easily with no wind but wind came up for our last 6 miles. Badger and Soap creek rapids were read and run. I took a spicier run down Soap Creek than I should have and decided to be a bit more cautious going forward. The group was tired with the wind so changed plans to camp above House Rock rapid instead of North Canyon to avoid fighting the wind. I warmed up chicken enchilada's that Keith previously prepped at home so it was an easy early dinner and early to bed. Lots of scorpion hunting and "finding" with our black lights after dark. It gets dark around 7:15 pm and not many stay up past 8 pm. Basically, we match our days on the river to daylight hours. We definitely have early bird risers on this trip. They like their coffee early. Most days we launch by 8:30 am which makes it nice to beat any afternoon winds, make time for stops and get to camps at a reasonable time in the afternoon.

The first time I've ever seen a meteor shower that bright, and it was framed by the Grand Canyon. How epic. There was one in particular that lit up the whole sky for several seconds and everyone in our party erupted from silence "woooooooooow". Max

We were visited in the night by ring tail cats. I was fast asleep and Gabby and Eric told me there were ring tail cats. I woke up, sat up and said "WHAT". They informed me of the creatures. I said there is NOTHING YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT, GO BACK TO SLEEP. -Kenji Hammon

"There are MAMMALS in your boat!" —Truest quote of the trip

Day 2: Aug 14, South Canyon camp: (~16 miles)

First up is House Rock Rapid, water is low as the dam release has not reached us yet. We scout the rapid and all run a left to right GC ferry to avoid the hole at the bottom. Rocky but doable. Observed quite a few NPS science trips (sediment and fishery) working on the river not only today but also throughout the rest of our trip. Stopped at North Canyon to wander up the canyon. Roaring 20's rapids begin just below North canyon and we read/run them all. Paul M rowed quite a bit and had an extra exciting run backwards and over a big hole in one of the 20's. I love the Roaring 20's as they are fun rolling rapids with good current to keep the miles clicking. Max rowed a bit as well throughout the trip starting today. NPS stopped to share a flyer with us about the dangers of flash flooding from Dragon fire affected areas. Almost all camps river right are particularly

vulnerable for flash flooding because of the unstable burned soils above us. Silver Grotto had a group camped so we picked South Canyon (lots to do there, Anasazi ruins, Indiana Jones cave, South canyon itself). The weather appeared unpredictable so I set up a tent to ensure it would not rain on us. Eric L entertained us with music and Scott W. suckered us all in with a soft quiet musical river poem about the wind, river flow and ravens and then screeched out the loudest raven call that made us all jump with laughter. Scott's raven screech became an oft repeated call during our trip.

“Caw caw!!” —Top inspirational quote of the trip

Day 3-4: Aug 15-16, Layover day, Nankoweep camp: (~22 miles)

Our initial goal was Saddle camp but I mentioned that we might be able to make this a layover opportunity day and the group was enthusiastic about the idea. Scott H. stopped at Vasey's for water fill up. Vasey's spring water flow was very low. Redwall Cavern was a calm musical break enjoyed by just our group. Plenty of flat water today, so we made the push for Nankoweep. Found all camps at Nankoweep full except for the very last one, whew that was a bit too close. We did not hike up Saddle to the waterfall but I have a feeling that spring was probably dry or extremely low flow. Today was overcast and we got a flashflood text warning for our specific area. Thankfully our camp is nicely protected, we set up 2 parawings to protect from rain. I set up my tent again and sure enough it did rain, quite hard. The group enjoyed the Anasazi granaries view and relaxed on our layover day. The private groups ahead and behind us are not very predictable despite communications ahead of time. Add to it the NPS science trips which move/stay every 3 days then zoom down river to catch up with us again is making camp planning a bit harder than usual. We are adjusting, it is not like we have not changed our plans as well (North to Hot Na Na and Saddle to Nanko as a layover). Trish gets nicknamed StarShine because of her positive and enthusiastic joy for her first Grand Canyon trip and her love of starry nights. She truly manifested this experience and so many in this group of first timers embody her astonishment and enjoyment of this trip. More than half of the group have never run the Grand Canyon before and Wendy had never even camped under the stars before. A Grand experience for veterans and newbies alike. So many stars at night to gaze upon.

I ate the best steak of my life on the river or off the river this night thanks to Keith Darby AKA Daddy. - Kenji H



Day 5: Aug 17, Upper Neville's camp: (~23 miles)

We get an early start as we know it could be a long day depending on what other groups go where, ahead of us. Max rowed a lot today and Scott W was our passenger for the day. The Little Colorado River was clear and light blue, gorgeous. I do not get to see this often in August so this was a special treat. We stop at Tanner to visit the Birthing Chair rock/petroglyphs. Unkar is our next stop to see the Anasazi ruins and pottery chards. Our camping plan got all out of whack when everyone had to back up further up river when a lone motor rig took Neville's. We pulled out at Upper Neville's and decided to stay put as all other camps were taken.

I forgot I was cooking tonight and it was a long day with missing some camps. Wendy completely calmed me down even though I have cooked on the river many times. Thanks Wendy! -Kenji H



Day 6: Aug 18, 91 mile camp: (~17 miles)

Wendy rides in our boat today and our first stop is to scout Hance Rapid. The group aims for the duck pond but no one makes it across including me. I ran some big holes (centerish) but stayed upright if not a bit cockeyed. Everyone does okay but Hance was tough. Sockdolager and Grapevine rapids are fun rapids at these flows and we all miss the big holes. We stop at Phantom Ranch to fill up water. The only activity we see is the trail building project and the large water treatment plant under construction. Helicopters continuously deliver long line supplies to this project. Phantom Ranch staff are evacuated and no hikers are seen. The wheelbarrow to carry our water jugs back to the boat beach is missing so we have to lug the 50 lb jugs back individually. Next stop is scout at Horn Creek rapid. On our return from the scout, Max rolls his ankle and it puffs up quickly. We all split the horns and run the rapid perfectly. We take the first camp below Horn at 91 mile and are grateful for a quiet camp. Max soaks his ankle in cold water and gimps along for the next week or so.

This was a low day for me because I hurt my ankle and was worried I wouldn't be able to carry my weight for the rest of the trip and I was very frustrated by the thought. Max

Had a terrible line through Hance as I got lost and went sideways through Emillio's hole. Thanks to Kay and Eric for helping me get my oar back in. Sheesh, that was scary. Better luck next time. Last time I ran Horn it was so low we had to do the left to right and I did not do well. This time we split them and it turned a scary rapid into a SUPER FUN rapid. -Kenji H

"Is this really how we're going to do this?" —Best personal-growth quote of the trip

Day 7: Aug 19, Ross Wheeler camp: (~17 miles)

Wendy is back in our boat and we have a lot of big rapids and scouts today. Granite, Hermit and Crystal are our first 3 scouts and we run them well. Keith makes a left run at Crystal but all the rest of us run a GC ferry river right. The rest of the Gem Rapids are read and run and the group declares today a fabulous rapid day! We thought about camping at Bass but preferred the beach and earlier shade at Ross Wheeler camp. Satisfying day!

Asked Christina exactly how she runs Granite. Followed her directions to a T and greased this line. Super satisfying as that one has kept me up at night thinking about the Grand at times. -Kenji H

Day 8: Aug 20, Blacktail camp: (~12 miles)

First stop was at Shinumo creek waterfall for a delightful pounding soak. Then ran Waltenberg rapid with a stop at Elves Chasm waterfall. Our camp at Blacktail was open and we enjoyed an early afternoon shady musical respite in this magical canyon. Thought I heard a helicopter but not sure, turns out there was an evacuation downriver from us at Bedrock rapid.

I'd never done open air camping without any sort of tent or cabin or enclosure of some sort and coming to the realization of how amazing it had been to be able to just roll out a mat on the raft and sleep was an amazing feeling. Max

I asked Scott H. What is up above Elves Chasm and he said he has been and it is pretty cool. I followed him up a little bit of a scramble up above Elves Chasm where there is another amazing pool and waterfall that are un-interrupted and arguably more beautiful. I've always wondered what is up there and it made my trip to check it out! -Kenji H

Day 9: Aug 21, Talking Heads camp: (~13 miles)

We run Spector Rapid, scout Bedrock rapid and run it well. I stop to talk to the private dory group camped just below Bedrock because something looks wrong. They are stunned and seem out of sorts. I do not share what they tell me to our group until camp. They have had two evacuations, one head injury and one broken leg (2 separate people). They are staying put to re-group and figure out a plan. Turns out they flipped a dory in Bedrock and they decided to leave the dory behind and continue on with the rest of their boats. I do not think they had a confident spare boatman to row the damaged dory out. I offered help and they appreciated it. I told them we planned to camp at Stone creek unless we had trouble in Deubendorf rapid. Turns out we all had plans for Deubendorf rapid (ie run far right) but were all funneled to the table rock hole on one side or another. I managed to get left of it and got lucky. Scott H was running with Russ and flipped when he hit it sideways. Confusion as to where Deb was because she walked the rapid when they scouted right while the rest of us scouted left. Keith, Paul and Scott H. got flipped boat over to river right well below our intended Stone creek camp and we flipped it back over with a lot of peeps/ropes. Lost a chair, cot and empty water jug. The group stayed calm and we floated to Talking Heads camp to re-assess the situation. I share the private dory group story with our group and we decide one flip is a lot less than what they are dealing with at this time. FYI: their group has more adventures at Lava Falls (major wreck with 2nd dory and mile 209 (flip in hole) rapids but evacuees were okay (out of ICU and other with a metal rod in their broken leg). Everyone gave a lot of thought about a better run at Deubendorf (nicknamed Newbendorf) and it is significantly more difficult after the summer 2024 flashflood. I vaguely feel like there might have been an option extremely far right at this flow but only saw it as a potential run as I dropped in the rapid. Others commented that far left was a better run. I am not so sure and would increase the difficulty rating to a 9 out of 10 at the ~17,500 flows we saw.

I'll never forget the faces of the people when we came up to their camp the morning after they had their 2 airlifts out. Like they had seen a ghost. It was great to see them in better spirits when we saw them back in Flagstaff. Max

Did not make it as far right as I needed in Doobenhaugen, it was the biggest hole I've ever hit sideways. Whew. -gab

Still thinking about Dubie at high flows. -Kenji H, me too - Christina

Day 10: Aug 22, Backeddy camp: (~4 miles)

We top off all our water jugs at Tapeats, treat with bleach dropper and move on down to Deer Creek for a leisurely day where everyone gets to do what they want to do. I thought we had all the camps lined out with all the groups but then the private dory group bypasses the Deer Creek stop and camps at Panchos. Oh oh, now we are stuck with Backeddy. Difficult camp but welcome after a day of play.

It was hot, but coming from south Florida summers it wasn't unbearably hot, especially with the cold river water so easily accessible. Max

Day 11: Aug 23, Upper Matkat Hotel camp: (~ 11 miles)

Paul M was told that Kanab canyon and Whispering Falls might have some good photo ops. Turns out not really. Next stop was Matkatamiba canyon with a team "tush push" up the water filled slot canyon and created a butt dam at the top. Lots of bighorn sheep and mule deer today and in general on our trip. The private dory group had taken Matkat hotel so we bailed out in Upper Matkat camp.

So glad I made it up Matkat as last time our group did not all make the eddy. Christina had an awesome game plan for sending me first with my cams to set up anchors. She is such a great planner. Thanks for the lesson Christina! -Kenji

Day 12: Aug 24, Middle Tuckup Canyon camp: (~17 miles)

Our first stop is to scout Upset rapid. I ran it poorly and hit the lower right of the main hole. I always think I will try the left run but always talk myself out of it. I think next time I will go far left as I am tired of getting too close to the hole at this rapid. Long stop at Havasu, with the private dory group bypassing Havasu and going to Tuckup camp. Find the NPS science trip is also at Tuckup and day is getting long with all other camps taken below. So we squeeze in between both Tuckup camps (I call it Middle Tuckup) and check in with other groups. Turns out NPS has given the private dory group a change in plans- ie an extra day and they will takeout at Diamond with us vs Pearce Ferry their original plan. I now understand why they have been going so slow and I prepare to tag team with them the rest of the trip and plan accordingly. They do let me know that they plan to camp above Lava Falls out of an abundance of caution the next day. We plan to run Lava Falls rapid tomorrow so should run ahead of them from here on out.

Had a wild line through Upset, ended up pulling hard through the hole. Must run left next time. Christina and Keith also voiced intrigue to go left next time. -gab

"That's a couple of nice sausages." —Extremely charming trip quote

Day 13: Aug 25, ~184 Mile camp: (~ 20 miles)

Lava Falls rapid day arrives. All our backup rowers row down for us to to the Lava Falls rapid scout. I am fresh as a daisy when we arrive at the scout. Max sets up to take pictures so we run last. We all run the right side run at Lava. Kenji, Scott H, and Keith have perfect runs. Brian was swept off his seat at the oars but Wendy scooped him back in within 17 seconds (we have camera proof). I did not have a perfect run and had to highside at the big Kahuna wave at the end. But all was upright so one in the win column for me. Tequila beach was celebratory so we rowed that high down to Mile 184 camp (or so I think, I am unsure but it was in the vicinity). Nice camping beach. Many salty snacks had by all!

I'll never forget both the run through Lava Falls itself but even more than that the feeling of heaviness from the group as we approached and scouted and then the relief and elation safely below the rapid on Tequila beach. Definitely one of my favorite moments. Max

Greasing Lava is interesting. I was very happy I did it, but don't want to get too cocky on that river ever. If I am rowing the Grand and I am not a little scared, take me off the sticks. -Kenji H

Sam made hand painted cards for everyone who joined the swim team. -Gab

Only three more sleeps left and I am already missing this place. My soul can rest here, my heart can heal here. I am becoming the authentic version of myself that I was always meant to be. It is impossible to put into words how amazing this trip has been. Truly a once in a lifetime experience! I want to always be the person that I have become over the past sixteen days. This place is healing me like a soothing salve to all my hurting parts. I am listening. Trish Starshine





Day 14: Aug 26, Mile 202 camp: (~ 18 miles)

Whitmore pictographs proved to be less exciting than the commercial helicopter swoops taking clients out at Whitmore helipad. Parashant Wash is running red from flash flooding last night when we pause at this potential camp, we finally meet the “USS Trump” solo catboater from Durango. He informs us that the other private group we have been chasing left 45 minutes ago and were not heading for Mile 202 camp. I think they have Russ’s missing water jug. Oh well, opportunity lost. The solo catboater seemed pretty laid back about his solo runs but said they had all gone well and wanted to bring his daughter (in a couple of years when she turns 12) and friends on a future trip if they prove up to the challenge. Eric created the funniest GC song for our group tonight.

“No tolio in my holio!” —Most motivational quote of the trip

Day 15: Aug 27, Mile 220 camp: (18 miles)

Mile 205, 209 and 217 are our last rapids. We stop at Jump Rock for brave jumpers to hop off the cliff into the river. Max's Garmin watch popped off and was lost. Trish and Wendy landed less than vertical and got leg/buttock bruises from their landing on the water.



Paco Pad nighttime confessions: I knew it was wrong, I had kept you at bay the whole trip but this was the last night and I let my guard down. On previous nights I actually sought you out, the attraction was strong, but many times you eluded me. Was there another who owned your heart? Quite possibly but I wanted to find you nonetheless. I was reckless, I didn't care. In the dark we could learn about each others night time wants and needs by the pale soft light. On this last night you sought ME out! You came to me quietly so as not to wake the others to our tryst. We spend one magical night together that I will never forget and in the morning you left my bed as gently as you entered it....trying to spare me the sting of your departure but as I adjusted the sheets I saw you leaving me.... My tiny scorpion lover!
Trish Starshine

“Where are we?” ... “In the Grand Canyon!” —Deepest quotes of the trip

Day 16: Aug 28, Takeout & hot showers!: (6 miles)

We are the first group at Diamond – no surprise. AZRA is right behind us. We get de-rigged and loaded up and out by 11 am. We never see the other private dory group until dinner that night when they choose the same brewery we do and we find out the rest of their trip adventures. Hot showers and non-sandy beds are so welcome.

The dinner crew is unrecognizable with shaved beards and fresh clothes. Bittersweet to say goodbye. - gab

Over and over I came back to the feeling of not wanting to be done and wanting to keep going down the river while also simultaneously wanting my bed, my shower, my wife and dog just as badly. Strange place to be. Life has felt so much calmer than normal this past week since getting back. Things that might have made me anxious or frustrated slid off my back like nothing. Renewed perspective on want vs need and how much work actually needs to get done in a day. Max

Took Gab on a romantic date to A&W in Seligman Arizona. -Kenji H