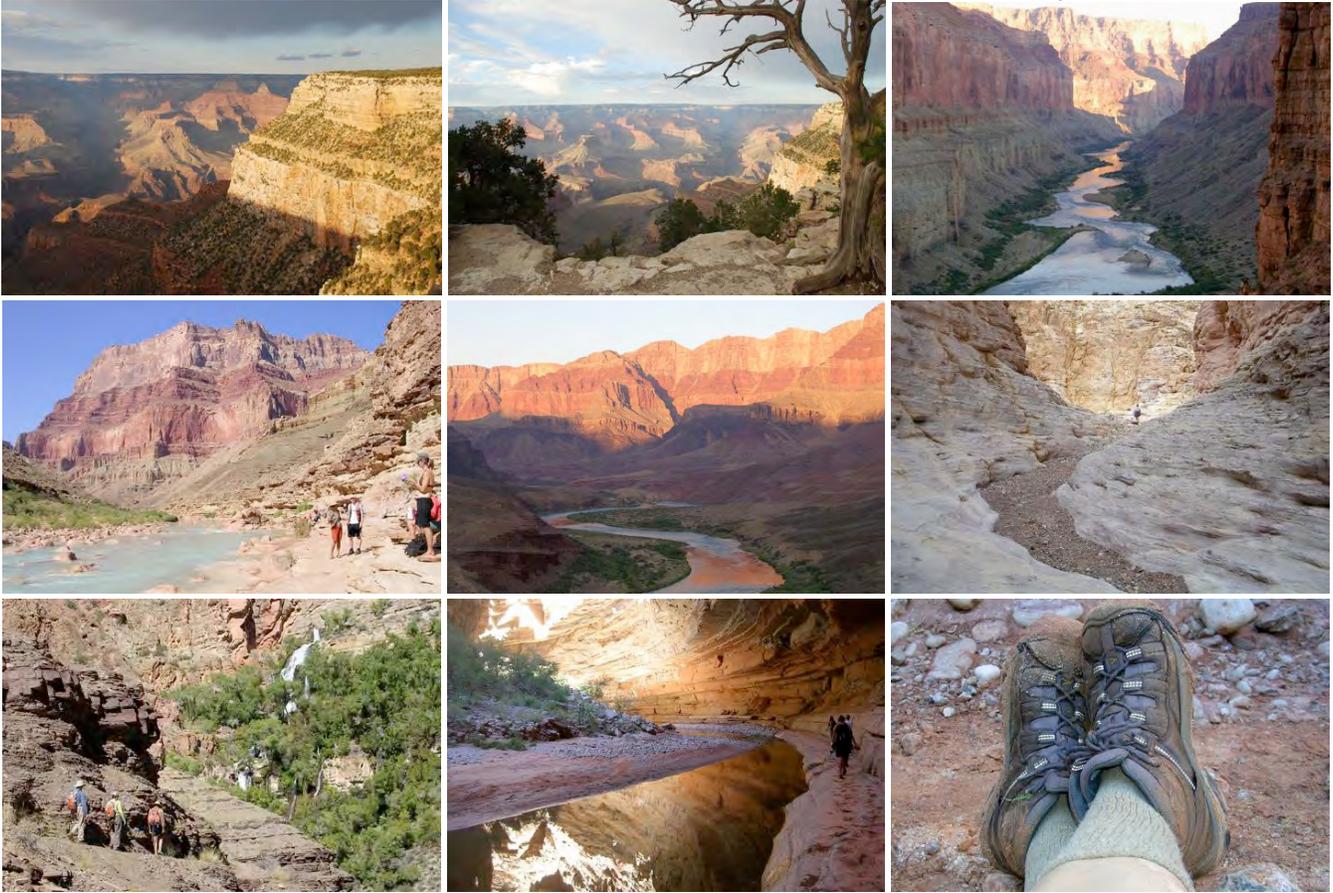


## Like Water for Water - The Over-Forty Trip Down the Colorado

A more serious, hardcore, and reflective trip compared to that at thirty-two...



Left to Right: (top) views from South Rim, Nankoweap; (middle) Little Colorado, Unkar Delta sunset, 75-mile slot canyon; (bottom) edgy trail to Thunder River/Falls, first epiphany in Kanab Canyon, muddy and wet creek-slogging boots

### Introduction

While traveling through Norway in too much style but with insufficient action this June, I knowingly longed for this trip - albeit with the equally knowing sense that I anticipated I would need to remind myself how much I wanted a more authentic wilderness experience when things - no doubt - became difficult or uncomfortable. Indeed, revisiting the Colorado almost ten years after my first trip was more challenging - although I did intentionally choose a longer and more difficult format trip. Ever since my first rafting trip down the Colorado, I knew I would repeat it; in fact, it remains a personal goal of mine to go down the Colorado at least once during every decade of my life - largely because I do appreciate how humbling the experience is at all levels (i.e. I don't think I would like myself as a person if I found myself unwilling to sustain this kind of serious camping).

Given what was some unsatisfying stuff my first time (some of which I mildly alluded to in that report), I knew my second time had to be different. Said first trip, booked with OARS two years in advance, was supposed to have been a longer trip with a stronger hiking emphasis; unfortunately, OARS' permit situation evolved over the course of those two years - to the point that the ultimate, corresponding permit dates OARS received represented only a thirteen-day trip. Consequently, we wound up trying to cram hiking AND rafting nearly 300 miles into that timeframe. Said first trip was also in mid-August, owing to that being the usual time I have off from teaching; this meant suffering through daytime temperatures of 90-110°F, with nights seldom below 85. Given my sabbatical this year, I decided that I had to finally experience a "real" Colorado hiking/rafting trip in the appropriately cooler fall season. Although OARS does offer some hiking-oriented trips in the spring and fall, I elected to go with a different company (AZRA) for a variety of reasons: First, AZRA's hiking trips featured both oar-boats as well as a paddle-boat (where OARS did not have a paddle-boat on my last trip and seemed wishy-washy about providing them unless you, like, chartered a trip for paddlers). Second, my good friend Roger did the lower canyon version of this trip with AZRA twenty years ago and highly recommended them. And, third, AZRA has historical and philosophical ties to ARTA, the fantastic company I'd gone down the Selway with. Indeed, I have been drifting away from OARS for the last several years - largely because I have discovered better companies in terms of style, the ability to attract more experienced clients, the willingness to do more beefy/edgy hikes, and overall cost-to-service ratio. And so I signed up for AZRA's 16-day hikers' discovery special - only one year in advance. I will say upfront that AZRA lived up to its reputation and there were zero (in my opinion) differences with respect to basic things like food or service when compared with that provided by OARS; in fact, I felt I got more for my money on this trip simply because of the well-run paddle-boat option. Give that OARS remains the most expensive company in the canyon, I think those statements say a lot. Nonetheless, the nature of this particular AZRA trip (i.e. 16 days and focused on hiking) is not comparable to the lighter trip I did with OARS in other ways and - for many reasons - beginners (i.e. people without a lot of outdoor experience) or first-timers to the canyon may want to pick a less-intense option

with either company. Although most members of our group were experienced outdoors-people and hikers, nearly all were first-timers in the canyon and several were first-time rafters.

In addition to choosing a different company and venue, I also had several personal things on my agenda for this trip. First and foremost, my first trip down the canyon remains marred by some fairly strong, negative feelings about a situation I touched on in the previous report: the relationship meltdown between my best friend (Jenn) and her then-fiancé (Steve), which terminated following the trip (strongly catalyzed, in my opinion, by the trip). Roger, it should also be noted, suffered a similar marital breakdown following his trip down the canyon. Although I was ultimately satisfied (for lack of a better word) by Jenn and Steve's ultimate breakup, living through their relationship demise in the context of that river-trip was not pleasant and I sometimes did feel like a casualty of war - half because there were some ugly fights and half because, as the trip progressed, Steve effectively abandoned Jenn, leaving her with me - upset and sometimes crying. The fights (especially those that happened while driving to Flagstaff) got so ugly that I never even got to see the Grand Canyon from the South Rim (as we'd all agreed to do during the planning stages of this trip). Both problems, in conjunction with just traveling with friends (in general), made the first trip more about social relationships than it did about being in the canyon, living in that moment. Indeed, I would say - based on this AZRA trip - that I hardly remembered most of the lower canyon because my focus was on chatting on the boats and socializing in camp. Consequently, I made the following decisions about this trip: no friends or family were coming with me, no stupid-ass driving to Flagstaff, and I made explicit plans to visit the South Rim for two days prior to putting in. The second personal agenda item was that my dad's last known planned trip had been to the North Rim and Coyote Buttes (i.e. The Wave); in general, my dad had enjoyed a long relationship with the Grand Canyon - visiting the rim areas many times, hiking Havasu, and even rafting below Diamond Creek with a military group. Even though I never made it to the North Rim on this trip (a long story I'm not going to tell), I did carry one of dad's famous handkerchiefs (see Rainier collection) down the canyon (as in, like, tucked into my swimming suit bra every day). Although I did consider hiding it somewhere en route or even casting it into Lava Falls, I decided - because my dad had never visited these specific places - that it needs to find its ultimate home at the North Rim. And so it remains with me until I make that pilgrimage, including The Wave. Whenever I was scared (be it off some cliffy edge, during some insane scramble, or just before paddling huge whitewater), I admit that the handkerchief helped me; I also "felt" my dad every day and know he greatly enjoyed this trip.



Left to Right: first view of canyon (includes Indian Garden, along Bright Angel), double rainbow, Mather Point

### September 25-6, 2008 - Travel Time and South Rim

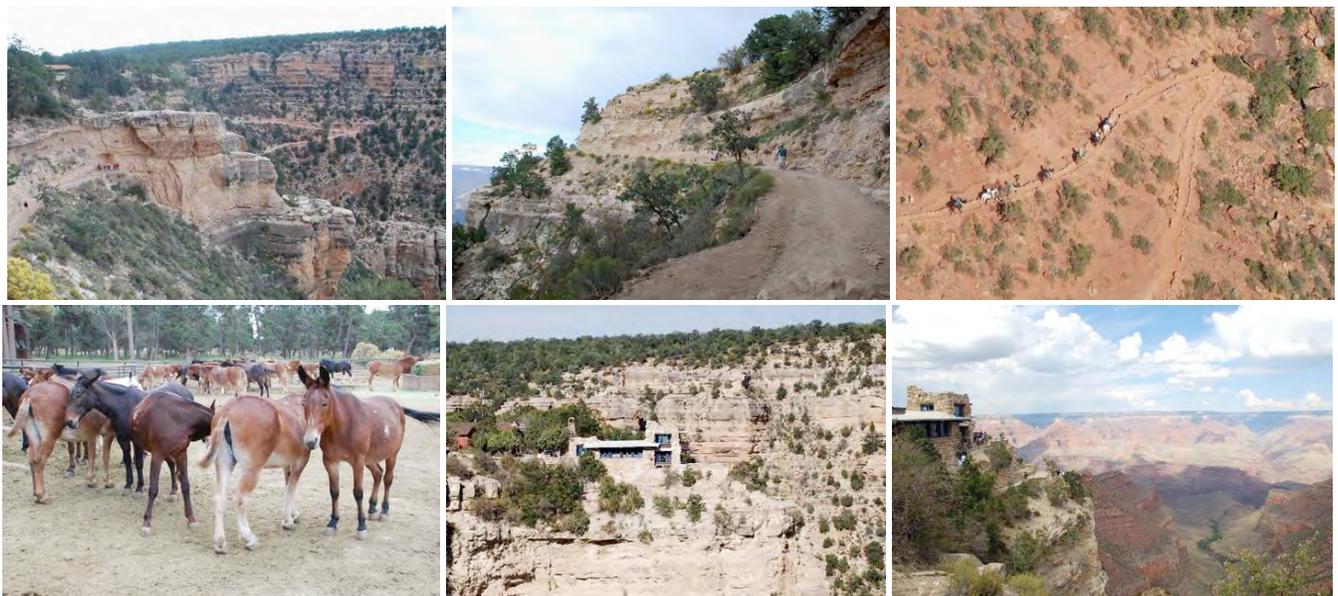
After spending a restless night in Portland, I flew out of PDX around 8 a.m. There are, of course, no direct flights to Flagstaff, meaning - in my case - a short layover and transfer at Phoenix (a surprisingly large airport that reminded me - for some reason - of Chicago's insane airport), which was roasting at 104°F. I then boarded a little 40-seater prop plane, flying to cooler/higher Flagstaff's super-small airport in less than an hour. There, I enjoyed a BLT (being that I was famished) before catching the Flagstaff Express Shuttle, which AZRA recommended for getting to the South Rim (cost = \$30). My driver (both times) was this classic blond aging hippie who had also terminated a marriage after visiting the Grand Canyon (gee - is there a theme here?). Other passengers included this pair of Russian women who were on their way to do a lower canyon OARS trip; they seemed slightly taken aback that I had gone with OARS before but had chosen a different company this time. Driving to the South Rim, one has little sense that a giant canyon exists somewhere out on that gently rolling terrain. Unfortunately, the final couple of miles are littered with a virtual mini-metropolis of tourist facilities. These include at least five major lodges, 3 huge campgrounds, numerous eating facilities, and - apparently - a full-on public school that serves the children of year-round staff who live in the "village." I found the development at the South Rim 100% offensive; I cannot imagine what I would have thought of it had I been there during high season. Most shuttle passengers disembarked at the Maswik Lodge, one of the cheaper facilities that is located back from the rim (i.e. a ten minute walk). In contrast, I had booked a "partial view" room at the Thunderbird Lodge, which cost about \$225. Although I found the room adequate, I wouldn't go back there again; I found the staff hurried and indifferent - probably because it was pure chaos everywhere. Check-in for the Thunderbird took place at the Bright Angel Lodge, famous (to me) because I think that's where the Brady Bunch stayed. As I discovered, the most posh lodge and dining facilities are in the El Tovar. Indeed, I would probably stay there if I ever returned to, say, hike to Phantom Ranch. After checking in at 4:30 p.m., I proceeded out along the congested promenade that represents the rim trail (although, as with most national parks, traffic diminished as a function of distance to parking lots). At the time, I carried and used my still new-feeling digital SLR Nikon, which I'd agonized about bringing because I knew how challenging the sand and water would be once the rafting trip began. Although I stored said camera in a Pelican case, I also - to be safe - packed my dad's small Nikon point-and-shoot... knowing that if the big camera was too stressful, I could rely on the smaller one and safely store the former (which is, essentially, what happened). But there on the rim, the big camera was greatly appreciated. Although looking over the South Rim was awesome, it was not as mind-boggling as I was expecting it to be (based, that is, on all the hyperboles people use when presented with said view). In retrospect, I think it was the opposite effect of something one of our guides said: typical tourists stare over the canyon less than two minutes because they cannot fathom what they are seeing. For me, I'd already run the length of the canyon... and I knew there was something missing in that two-dimensional image. Of course,

there were also too many people to appreciate or contemplate anything serious. Given that sunset (around 6:30) was approaching, I tried to make the best of the remaining daylight time. First, I walked to the Bright Angel trailhead, easily given away by the acrid smell of mule piss (even more the next day as they actually set out down the trail). The mule pen, home to several dozen smelly asses, was ten minutes from the rim.



Left to Right: Bright Angel Lodge, El Tovar and Thunderbird from Bright Angel Trail, rim trail near El Tovar

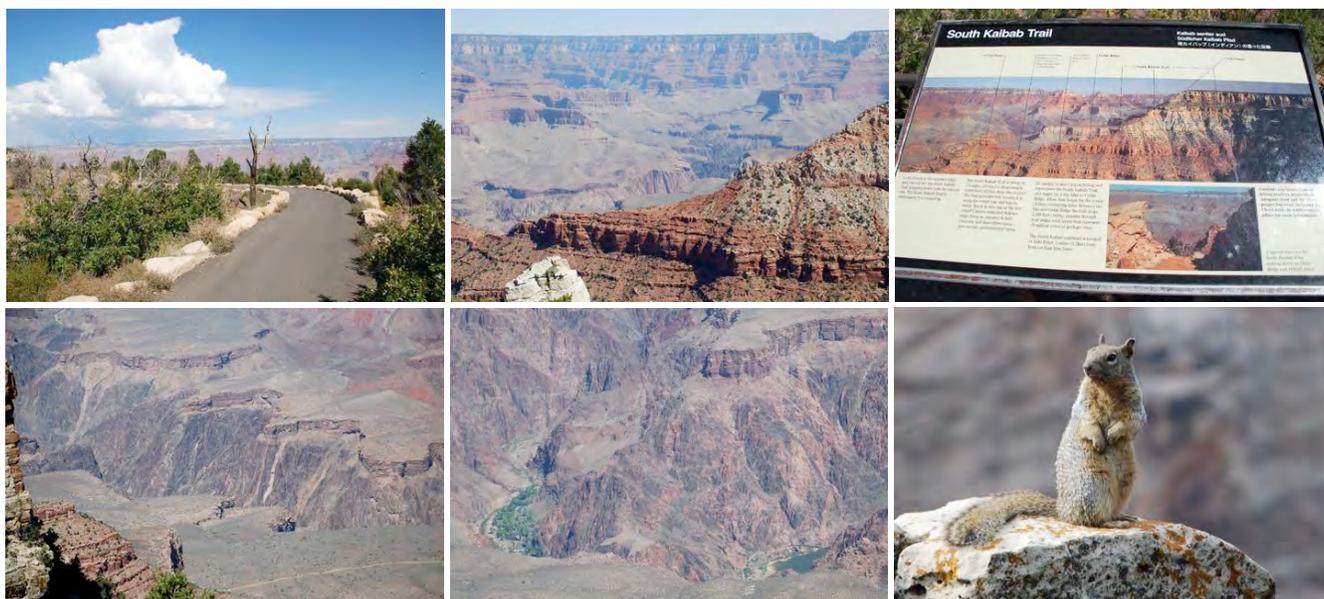
In contrast with expectations, the Bright Angel trail did not seem intimidating to me; walking down twenty minutes, I found it completely wide (easily six feet in most places) and seldom, like, RIGHT along some sheer drop-off. Indeed, of all the places I saw on the South Rim, the Bright Angel and South Kaibab trails (another nearby trail leading down to Phantom Ranch) were the only things that interested me (to the point I might, like I said, have to return here just to hike them). Returning to the rim, I visited the Lookout Studio, which seemed - like most historic buildings - to be housing yet another gift shop (lord knows - there were WAY too many of these!). I then proceeded east along the rim trail, hiking maybe a mile to the junction with the park headquarters (which I never bothered to visit). Given that dark clouds seemed to be gathering, I headed back toward the lodge complex - a double rainbow eventually forming over the canyon. I spent most of the sunset at this nondescript spot (ten minutes from the lodge area) with an especially nice view of the Zoroaster Temple - momentarily satisfied that it was possible to find places of serenity at this insane location. And then I returned to the crazy zone, ultimately patronizing this tiny food vendor and ice cream shop that offered the equivalent of gas station mini-mart food (i.e. hot dogs, standard fresh fruit, various bottled drinks, and chips - which is what I had for today's dinner). I also stocked up on yogurt for tomorrow's breakfast.



Left to Right: (top) Bright Angel trail; (bottom) mules, Bright Angel Lodge, Lookout Studio and view

The next morning, I slept in until nine - uninterested in trying to shoot the sunrise (which would have required waking at six) and feeling indifferent about another day dealing with South Rim insanity. Knowing I had to check out by eleven, I rose to admire the canyon from my partial view window and eat my yogurt. Despite contrasting information from yesterday's young Asian women (who barely spoke English) manning the Bright Angel Lodge front desk, I safely left my bags there free of charge after checking out. I then sat down with my park literature to fully comprehend the free bus system, ultimately growing motivated to do some walking. Specifically, I rode the blue line out as far as it went east, then caught the green line all the way to Yaki Point. Near here, I was one of three small parties (all others from Europe) who set out to walk the three miles back to the lodge complex. Although there were no grand epiphanies en route, it was pleasant - despite many completely exposed spots where one could easily fall off of major cliff edges. Indeed, it was easy to see why a surprising number of casual tourists actually fall or stumble to their death in this park. I did enjoy a few minor epiphanies, however: watching hikers descending the upper South Kaibab trail, and getting to see a tiny section of the Colorado River, Phantom Ranch, and the dramatic inner canyon from around Mather Point. Unfortunately, Mather Point was insane - as was pretty much everything from there and back to the lodge area. Nevertheless, I did patronize a small gift shop, buying a couple handkerchiefs that showed all the geological layers of the canyon. Given that it was getting hot, I ate some Luna bars and hydrated near the place I turned around last night - before making the final push to the truly crazy area. By then, I was REALLY hungry and had

to indulge another hot dog, banana, smoothie, plus chocolate ice cream cone (the latter was not as delicious as it looked, however). In front of a large, amused crowd, I also had to physically fight a squirrel for my banana; it had actually sunk its teeth and claws into it and was dragging it away with tangible force when I yanked it back. Owing to the fact I am a microbiologist (i.e. know that squirrels have been known to carry the plague), I only ate the half that wasn't punctured.



Left to Right: (top) near Yaki Point, South Kaibab; (bottom) inner canyon, Phantom Ranch, evil plague-squirrel

Unfortunately, I was bored the rest of the afternoon; I should have just asked to get on the two o'clock shuttle back to Flagstaff. At least then, I could have checked in to my hotel, showered, and taken a nap. Instead, I twiddled my thumbs until four, occasionally fighting mobs of women for limited and smelly restrooms. Arriving in Flagstaff around five thirty, I ordered room service (salad and spring rolls, both excellent) because I was tired of people and just wanted to watch the presidential debate. The Radisson was FAR more posh than the Days Inn OARS used; I definitely appreciated all amenities before and after the rafting trip. Later, AZRA's pre-trip meeting was very organized, although none of our guides were present. A couple company rep's did a presentation about the gear we were being given; there was also basic gear available for sale if we forgot something. Everyone on our trip, including myself, was renting a tent and sleep kit that we'd receive at the put-in. Tonight, we received our main gear drybags (sufficient for all general gear I carried, most of which I used) and our day drybags (while these were generous, I - having hauled the big camera - struggled to fit everything in there). Day drybags were supposed to carry anything we wanted during the day: hiking boots, daypack, raingear, camera, sunscreen and sunglasses. Having been given daybag dimensions in advance (18X20 inch manila envelope style), I knew they were going to be small. Because I also knew my usual daypack (e.g. internal frame Alpine Lowe Vision 40) would not fit in there, I had invested in a new Mountainsmith lumbar pack. Although I LOVED this pack on Oregon dayhikes requiring two liters of water, it was uncomfortable if you had to carry over three liters of water (which happened in the canyon). Given my ankle injury from February (i.e. see Norway report), I also had been given strict orders from my DR to wear sturdy high-top boots; while my broken-in Keen Targhee's served me well on this trip, they were a bitch to scrunch down into the daybag - especially after sloging through creeks. Before the trip, I also calculated that my usual Pelican 1300 camera case was too big; consequently, I broke down the big camera (separating lens from body) to store it in a smaller Pelican 1150 - which, like I said, BARELY fit in the daybag given everything else. Had I followed my instinct, I would have left this camera at home. Other gear stuff: I carried two one-liter Nalgens (both clipped to the boat or carried in the lumbar pack) plus a three-liter Platypus bladder, which came out for several hikes. Although I brought both an actual NRS splash jacket (well-used throughout this trip, owing to the extensive paddling I chose to do) as well as my usual hiking rainpants, ARZA wanted people to have more durable, rain-resistant bottoms; thus, I purchased NRS pants at the pre-trip meeting for sixteen bucks. Despite going down the Colorado in minimal clothing (i.e. non-water-resistant shorts and shirts, and Chaco sandals) during my last August trip, I - and most others - donned full raingear on the paddle-boat given what were cooler days and bigger water/wetter rides.

Shockingly (at least to me), our six-oarsman crew (whose names were written on the front board) was ultimately dominated by females, none of whom felt like "token women" hired just to represent said gender - which, unfortunately, felt like the case on some other rafting trips (including my previous trip with OARS). During the upper canyon, the crew was 3:3 male:female; at Phantom Ranch, our male paddle captain left the trip and was replaced with a young woman (resulting in 2:4 male:female). Two "trip assistants" (a couple from New Mexico) helped mostly with cooking and packing - the wife during the whole trip, the husband just during just the lower section. Our initial passenger group consisted of both whole-canyon and upper-only individuals - and, like the guides, was well-represented by women. Upper-only passengers included three family/friends from Texas or Massachusetts, a couple and a solo female traveler from California, and a solo male traveler from Sweden who spoke limited English and (while fit) seemed unprepared for this trip. Whole canyon passengers included two friends from California or Hawaii, a couple from Seattle, a couple from Maryland, and three solo female travelers from Oregon (me), Colorado, and Tennessee. At Phantom Ranch, we lost all the upper-only folks but gained three new passengers: a solo male traveler and a couple - all from Washington D.C. During the upper part of the canyon, the passenger age range was broad (thirties through sixties), the majority in super-shape (i.e. the pace seemed fast for me). During the lower part of the canyon, I

was the youngest - but the pace seemed kinder. But I am getting ahead of myself. By just after eight, I was back in my hotel room - quickly packing my drybags given the amount of thought I'd already put into the process. One item I ultimately chose to bring because the potential for being cold scared me (plus there was extra room in the general gear drybag) was my magic wetsuit; although I never wore the thing, it seemed to do its magic, nonetheless.



Left to Right: AZRA bus departing Flagstaff Radisson, toilet stop in Cameron, approaching Navajo Bridge

**September 27, 2008 - River Day One, Lee's Ferry to 13-Mile Camp**

At some point while packing the night before, I thought I put out a request for 6 a.m. room service breakfast (given that we were supposed to be loading the bus at seven). After waking at 5:45, I didn't get antsy about my lack of food until 6:30. Given that I'd forget to check a service time, I was down at the hotel restaurant shoveling breakfast in under five minutes - even though I don't think the bus arrived until at least 7:20. Although the school bus looked a little old from the outside, there were actually plush, renovated seats inside - making for a surprisingly comfortable 2.5-hour ride to the put-in. As usual, we made a brief bathroom stop at Cameron, an odd collection of tourist-oriented shops run by the Navajo (if I am not mistaken). The scenery during the drive seemed more interesting than before. AZRA also gave us the distinct opportunity to walk over the old Navajo Bridge (which parallels the newer one for cars) and visit the small but scenic visitor center on the other side - albeit mostly for water and another bathroom break. Here, the bridges and much of the surrounding land are only about 500 feet above the river, a vast difference from the depths (thousands of feet below the rim) we'd eventually be floating.



Left to Right: Colorado from about 500 feet up, new/car Navajo Bridge from old/walking version, visitor center on other side

Being that Navajo Bridge is only five miles from Lee's Ferry, we were almost done driving. Although there was another party at the put-in, it didn't seem as crazy as last time... perhaps because motorized boats are not allowed down the Colorado after mid-September. Our fleet consisted of six boats, none dedicated to gear only (as was the practice with OARS). Among them, of course, was the paddle-boat - which, thankfully (in my opinion) - had a frame for carrying its load of gear (i.e. substantial weight - hopefully to assist with not flipping). I can't say that there was much of a formal introduction to all the guides; thus, it took me a couple days to recognize and name each one. Since I eventually rode with each of them, I'll comment as those events happened. However, given the amount of shit that I take from my colleagues, I will state upfront that - in contrast with other trips - all our guides were, like, totally down-to-earth people... as opposed to hormone-inducing super-hunk alpha males. Of course, I don't know if that's partly because I am older... or because so many guides on this trip were women. In any event, don't expect much in the way of crazy trip antics or lust as per my previous report... GOOD because it did lend to a more reflective, real, and peaceful experience. Anyway, our leader was Jerry, who was in his late forties and had worked for AZRA for almost twenty years. Although Jerry seemed somewhat socially reserved, I liked him because he kept things on schedule well, was type A in terms of details, and was an extremely experienced hiker. He was not my favorite leader because, well, I am a sucker for outgoing people with crazy-strong personalities. After a standard safety spiel, we fire-lined our gear down to the boats and then proceeded on a short hike (i.e. less than an hour) that ascended this prominent knoll behind the put-in area - notably overlooking Paria Creek. At the time, I was second in line - actually (but for the only time) keeping up with Jerry's always-torrid pace. Upon returning to the put-in, I elected to ride in the paddle-boat, taking what seems my usual position (right, middle). At the time, many people seemed hesitant to join the paddle-boat; as with all my other trips featuring paddle-boats, however, this atmosphere would change once people acclimatized to the river. Our paddle captain for the upper river was Harlan, whose young looks defied his actual experience and depth. Harlan, which apparently is a Welsh name meaning "of the snow," was named because he was born under such conditions. Now in his late twenties, Harlan left most of us speechless with his stories - particularly about cultural trips down the Colorado with the Hopi. Of course, Harlan was also the closest thing to guide eye-candy on this trip - although his interesting spirituality transcended the lust factor. Prior to this trip, I had never considered an all-paddling trip down the Colorado - largely because so much of the river is flatwater (90%). Both Harlan and Somer (our lower canyon paddle captain), though, definitely had this perfect way of leading flatwater - usually using the new (for me) command: paddle and pause. Between their leadership and the mesmerizing

surroundings, I actually have put "paddling the whole canyon" on my to-do list because, while the rapids were exhilarating, the flatwater was strangely peaceful and meditative.



Left to Right: (top) Lee's Ferry fire-line, boats, from hike/knoll; (bottom) looking up Paria drainage, at historic orchards, group

Anyway, we rafted about thirteen miles today, running Badger and Soap Creek rapids (both rated 5-6 on the 10-point Grand Canyon scale). Despite the fact that I've done a LOT of whitewater since my first time down the Colorado (which was running 8,000 cfs), I thought the rapids felt bigger (this time, running 12,000 cfs) - as hydraulically large as the Chilko and Futaleufu. Even so, it's been almost two years since I've been on a major river trip (my last big one - the terrible and rather frightening Futaleufu); consequently, I had been somewhat nervous going into this trip that the water might scare me. In fact, though, I think this trip - overall - gave me back my river mojo, albeit not in some crazy, over-confident manner. Thankfully, too, both Badger and Soap Creek rapids were straightforward, requiring no complex turns or dangerous rock features. In between the paddling and pausing, Harlan taught us - among other things - the dirty geology mnemonic that never got recorded in my previous report: Kissing takes concentration however sex requires more breathing and tongue, very slowly... referring to Kaibab, Toroweap, Coconino, Hermit Shale, Supai, Redwall, Muav, Bright Angel, Tapeats, Vishnu Schist. I don't recall where we had lunch; I know it, like most days, featured sandwiches or wraps of some kind. On this trip, all my lunches were rounded out with peanut butter-coated apple slices and various pieces of wrapped candy - which AZRA memorably provided and my dad (a fervent candy addict) would have devoured. Of course, upon coming home, I promptly went to the dentist and was told I had a cavity (the first in many years). Oh well.



Left to Right: Obama in the Grand Canyon, 13 mile supai ledges camp - looking upstream and downstream

Our camp was at 13-mile camp on river right, specifically by or on supai ledges (albeit with a sandy area for the kitchen and lower campsites). At any one time, about half the passengers camped in a tent. For reasons stated during my first trip down the Colorado, I was a tent person - to the chagrin of a few guides and clients (I am stubborn - what can I say?). The first couple days, more people did not use tents; later, after some rain and/or blowing sand, tent usage predictably increased. AZRA's provided tents were lower-end two-man tents (Eureka or Kelty, I honestly can't remember); although they were fine, the poles were often challenging to break down and my tent, in particular, was amusingly bowed in all directions. Had there been more than just me in there, I would have minded. The sleep kits were also lower-end, featuring rectangular bags with old-school cotton/flannel interiors. On one occasion, my sleeping bag got fairly soaked (I still don't know if it was my poor packing or a few visible pinpricks in the drybag); had it not been warm out, I don't think the thing would have dried out. Were I to do this trip again, I'd probably bring my own bag - despite the fact that I know (from previous experience) how trashed said item becomes. AZRA also provided a plush fleece liner bag, which seemed like overkill given our warm temperatures. Everyone slept on standard white vinyl pads that were lashed to boats for padding during the day. In camp, the kitchen and bathroom set-ups were similar to procedures and equipment I've worked with on other trips. The one HUGE (and I mean: REALLY huge) improvement, though, was with the water situation: now, these mechanical filter-based pumps are used to rapidly clean huge amounts of drinking water. No more hand-pumping using ceramic filters that frequently clog!!! The new

pump system, which was operated solely by the guides, fit into a medium-sized ammo. can and was impressive to watch (speaking, that is, as a microbiologist). We filled our bottles freely from giant (at least 10 gallons) brown plastic containers - the filtered water especially tasty. While the actual groover boxes were updated, their operating instructions were the same as always... although AZRA let us put tampons in the can, which I don't think was the case on any of my other trips. Indeed, I ALMOST avoided my period on this trip... but then, as on the last trip, Lava Falls got me started a little early. Given all these amenities, I'd love to say I slept well... but the truth is that I struggled with sleeping pretty much during this whole trip - and I really don't know why... although my most consistent annoyance was needing to get up to pee two or three times in the middle of the night. Like most others, I was in bed by between 7:30 and 8:30 p.m. - our daily wake-up's typically at six.



Left to Right: (top) South Canyon - views, trail, dwelling, petroglyph; (bottom) Redwall Cavern - approaching, within

### September 28, 2008 - River Day Two, 13-Mile Camp to Nautiloid Canyon (mile 35)

Today was a mostly on-the-river day, albeit with a couple short riverside stops. I rode as a passenger with Jerry - along with Jackie number one (wife of Jim - both from Seattle, and both recent sixty-something retirees with more energy than most of us in our forties). That day, Jackie was my Jenn - sort of: we were engaged in lots of interesting conversations, we seemed intent on trying to loosen Jerry up, and we simultaneously peed off the side of the boat - howling with laughter (which actually did garner a grin from Jerry). Of course, Jackie had to join me after I suffered my first bout of urination stage fright (i.e. I got all set up but then my nerves got the best of me), which I chock up to Jerry (who did intimidate me at the beginning of the trip). Early in the day, we also hit our first legitimate class 8 rapid (House Rock, mile 17), a complex rapid containing some challenging rocks and holes. One of the rafting virgins on the paddle-boat unfortunately fell out upon hitting the first big wave; fortunately, she was quickly rescued by her husband - albeit after briefly floating in front of the boat - House Rock proper between her and river left. Although she would be our only true swimmer on this trip, she never again rode in the paddle-boat. Today, I'd been looking forward to a more extensive and lengthy stop at North Canyon (which we'd briefly done with OARS - up to, that is, the first big pool) or similarly-featured Silver Grotto (which a colleague said was spectacular). But we only stopped at South Canyon (between miles 31-32), a less sexy scramble/hike up to several Pueblo ruins. Later in the trip, I learned that swimming beyond the stagnant pools (which had earned adjectives like "typhoid") at North and Silver was now considered unsanitary - owing to some scary Staph infections (including MRSA) among guides and clients. Getting to the ruins at South Canyon, though, was not a cakewalk; like pretty much all hikes on this trip (regardless of length), there was some kind of crazy scrambling maneuver (usually several) - this time, up a 10-foot layer of semi-vertical limestone, encountered almost immediately upon leaving the beach. Indeed, Jerry reminded all of us (as we carried our water bottles in one hand, our cameras in the other) that we needed to treat all off-river outings as hands-free endeavors (i.e. get your daybags and packs in order). Although I did wear my Chaco sandals on this brief hike, I learned - too - that you truly wanted your boots for everything. Anyway - after scrambling to an intermediate platform, we visited some ruins and petroglyphs before climbing higher to a more intact rock wall-defined dwelling. From here, we could also look downriver at the small but impressive delta that had been used for farming.

Fifteen minutes after South Canyon, we arrived at Redwall Cavern (mile 33) - bypassing Vasey's Paradise (i.e. admired it from the boats). On my previous trip to Redwall, our leader accidentally slid the side of his face into a sand-covered rock while trying to catch a Frisbee. Consequently, when the Frisbee came out, I was slightly concerned there could be bloodshed. Fortunately, Jerry remained off by himself doing yoga. Given the hot daytime temperatures (probably in the mid-eighties - said to be unusual for this late in the season), I just enjoyed sitting in the cool shade - watching the various activities that took up the hour we lazed around in the sand. We then continued to Nautiloid Canyon (mile 35), our camp for the night (our same OARS trip night two camp). That night, we got our first taste of a few important things to come: some rainy sprinkles and windblown sand (albeit mild in comparison with future sites). Consequently, I made the decision to store the big camera in the Pelican case for the duration of the trip. It was too stressful to think about using given how sandy things already were... and it was ONLY night TWO? Already, too, I was washing my hair - something I don't think I did until at least night five on my last trip. Indeed, even though I knew the sand was BAD on the last trip, it felt far worse (and worse earlier) on this trip. Finally and

sadly, we never visited Nautiloid's limestone-embedded squid fossils (which I'd done with OARS before). But I kept my mouth shut - knowing that most others had no idea that option existed.



Left to Right: day two lunch, Nautiloid Camp, dinner (is that a sunburn already?)

**September 29, 2008 - River Day Three, Nautiloid Canyon to Nankoweap (mile 52)**

Today, I rode as a passenger with legendary Grand Canyon guide Martha - along with Mary, a solo female traveler from Tennessee (my favorite new friend on this trip). Martha was definitely an unexpected treat and a privilege to experience. At fifty-five, Martha had been a long-term Outward Bound instructor before becoming one of the first women oarsman in the Grand Canyon. Stunningly beautiful, she was outrageous, outspoken, and might (happily and on-purpose) offend some people with any number of statements. Having moved to Alaska five years ago to - among other things - open her own southwest cuisine restaurant, Martha frequently wowed us with her cooking... and awed us with her stories; between her and my tales of the Alsek, I think it's safe to say that a few members of this trip may be heading north in the coming years. Although Martha seems to have quit guiding full time for AZRA (having been fired twice, she will cackle), she seems to have struck some kind of deal where she comes down and does, like, one trip a year. All I can say: if you have the chance to do a trip with Martha, DEFINITELY take it because she's an amazing oarsman, a wealth of knowledge, and a fantastic storyteller.



Left to Right: (top) crack route, climbing sections, view from first cliff; (bottom) cliff, legendary Martha, Nankoweap graneries

Today also included our first substantial hike - although intense scramble is probably the better term. A couple miles down from Nautiloid, we pulled over on river left - to what seemed like an impossible spot for a hike: towering redwall cliff faces all around. Although this spot was loosely called Martha's Crack (no connection to guide Martha that I know of), no evidence of this route or name exists on any of my sources (which include both Belknap and RiverMaps). Jerry accurately estimated this hike would take an hour up, warning us to expect moments of climbing short semi-vertical cliff areas (where we'd be spotted) at the beginning - followed by a long, sustained scramble up a loose-rock chute. Although he didn't warn us, I knew - looking up at the towering redwall - that the goal was a cliffside walk along said edge (i.e. about 700-800 feet of straight-down exposure). I have taken the liberty of labeling a couple photographs (above) of said route from the river... after surviving it. Before embarking on this scramble, we spent 15-20 minutes gearing up: hiking boots, pack, and - in my case - taping my blister-prone toes. Most of us would agree that mid-day transitions between being on the river and doing hikes were time-consuming and slightly stressful. Hikes that took off from camp - whether all day affairs or shorter events in the morning or at the end of the day - were easier because we weren't changing out of major river gear or messing with our daybags. But I digress: after negotiating a short flat boulder field, we climbed a 10-foot semi-vertical rock section, walked some slightly exposed ledges, and then climbed a 20-foot semi-vertical rock section. While most foot- and hand-holds were bombproof, there were a few dicey ones where you definitely wanted someone covering you from below. At only two points during the whole trip was a rope ever pulled out; this was not one of them. After climbing the second section, I somehow got into this lull of space between the fast people and the slower folks - and found myself wandering alone through this increasingly high-angle loose-rock chute; Jerry, though, kept an eye on me from high above - guiding me back to the route whenever I seemed to lose

it. I would describe said crack/chute as similar in steepness to Aasgard Pass - albeit much shorter (i.e. this only gained maybe 600 feet)... but more challenging because there wasn't even a slightly obvious trail. At the top of the chute, there was an obvious path up this broad draw; being on top of the redwall, the canyon seemed to open up - revealing this unforgivingly drier but sweepingly rolling terrain. Of course, we soon encountered the anticipated cliff-edge, which we followed for fifteen more minutes. Despite making it up everything to this point, I found said edge the most challenging section to deal with. Fortunately, in most places, one could stay FAR back from the edge (I think the closest I got was, like, ten feet). Although I was dreading the hike down, I actually found the whole thing FAR more civilized than that going up. Of course, this is not to say that I wasn't down on my ass, lowering myself full-body over several big rock drops. Also, I earned one of two major injuries on this trip as I scrambled down the chute: as I was stepping down especially loose rocks, this large slab of rough rock fell forward - fully and deeply scraping the back of my left calf. Definitely blood now. More worrisome, these wounds turned various shades of oozing green and painful red over the next ten days - before finally scabbing up. After trying many different antiseptics and covering/uncovering regimens, I'd recommend washing things like this with simple soap and water - and then covering fully for two days at a time.

After the hike, we floated a lot of flatwater to Nankoweap, our camp for the night. Somewhat sadly (or at least knowingly, from my perspective), we quietly passed Saddle Canyon (mile 47) - a great hike from my last trip, clearly given away by an obvious trail up the hillside. Once at Nankoweap, we luckily found a spot to camp - given that two parties were already positioned along the long, curving beaches (one way upstream and one way downstream). Arriving around five, Jerry encouraged us to independently hike up to the granaries ASAP if we wanted to see them before dusk. Although he did not formally lead the trip, several other guides did loosely accompany the dozen or so people who eagerly went up. Given that I was definitely looking forward to this hike, I huffed up (about 800 vertical feet) the steep and stair-like trail of rocks - shockingly making it up in 35 minutes flat. As we climbed, people from both neighboring camps were up there and/or making their way down. I didn't spend a lot of time at the granaries - given that my main goal was to enjoy the sunset view down the river corridor (plus, I knew I'd be slow going down and I REALLY wanted some camp time for cleaning up). One thing that is worth mentioning when it comes to daybag issues post-hiking: you DEFINITELY need to remove your stinky boots and socks from the bags every night to air them out. Many of us noted - with great disdain - that the daybags started smelling REALLY bad (as in - rotting food and fungus ugly)... finally determining that it was because we'd left our sweaty boots and socks fermenting overnight after a hectic day. Although I obviously didn't make an effort to record all meals, I did fondly recall this was our first pasta dinner - something I had been craving all day. The garlic bread was especially delicious and plentiful.



Left to Right: heading up Nankoweap Canyon (first four), emerging from Kwagunt and looking downriver

#### **September 30, 2008 - River (Well, Hike) Day Four, Nankoweap-Kwagunt Traverse (emerging at mile 55.5)**

Today, as had been planned for the last few days, we had positioned ourselves for our first all-day hike - notably our most challenging route of the whole trip: a 10-mile, 2500 feet gained/lost traverse between Nankoweap and Kwagunt Canyons... the majority NOT on any official trail (and even then...?). As would be the case more than once, though, we learned that one of our neighbors (another commercial trip focused on hiking) was ALSO doing this traverse. Thus, Jerry decided we would leave a little later (at nine) in order to avoid spending all day sharing the route. As mentioned, today definitely tested my pack situation; I carried a full 5 liters (although I swigged half a liter during our morning talk, just before setting out). This meant that both pack side holsters contained Nalgene's - plus my three-liter Platypus sloshed freely in the main pack body... along with my lunch and some emergency clothing. For the first half of the day, the pack was so heavy that I often had to hold up the side holsters with my hands. In retrospect, I should have just carried three liters because we did have the opportunity to pump/filter water at the one-third mark. It should be noted that my decision to go fully loaded stemmed from a bad experience during my last trip (in over-100° heat): specifically, I ran out of water (after packing three liters) during a five-mile traverse in the Deer Creek area. While today did become hot, it was not stifling... and I didn't feel remotely uncomfortable until the late afternoon - well after the downhill section had started. But I am getting ahead of myself. After loading all our other gear onto the boats, we headed back up the social path towards the granaries - departing from the trail within five minutes to climb over this debris fan between our camp (on the delta) and the mouth of Nankoweap Canyon proper. While we were hiking, two guides would be taking some of the boats four miles downstream to the mouth of Kwagunt Canyon. They would then be doing our route in reverse - not only to take down the remaining boats, but also to pick up any people who decided midway across that they couldn't finish the traverse. So as to dispel the suspense: everyone who set out made it across. Our Swede, for unclear reasons, decided not to do any of today's hike... instead, he just got a terrible sunburn while sitting in camp.

Once we entered Nankoweap Canyon, we were - in theory - following a park trail (one that supposedly extends from the North Rim). Hmm - looked pretty sketchy to me. One of the things that had me concerned about today's hike was the prospect that we were going to be walking in the creek a lot... a theme I suspected would repeat throughout all hikes on this trip. While we would eventually succumb to walking in a LOT of water, today's creeks (both Nankoweap going up and Kwagunt coming down) were small and insubstantial (i.e. less than three feet across and less than four inches deep in most places). When I

used to wear nothing but Chaco sandals, the idea of hiking in water would not have bothered me. However, being forced to wear high-top leather boots, I was not relishing the idea of sloshing around in wet boots - particularly given my historic tendency to develop amazing blisters on my bunions and hammer toes. But Roger and Bryan both assured me before this trip that hiking in boots in water was the only way to go: my feet would be protected, blisters would not be any more of a serious issue and, yes, the boots would dry out. Today, however, did not give me the opportunity to test these hypotheses. For much of the hike up Nankoweap, I chatted with Kim - who, after some female client gossiping, was confirmed to be Jerry's girlfriend. I truly enjoyed all my time with Kim, a calm and warm woman... and not only because she successfully talked me across a very long exposed route (a forthcoming hike - not today's). In many ways, I identified a lot with Kim: she was close to my age, she had lived in Corvallis for several years, and she had been in a microbiology graduate program - largely because she had wanted to someday teach at a small college. After leaving the latter, Kim guided for awhile but then pursued nursing (her current full-time occupation) because it provided more stability. Unlike me, Kim was skinny, fit, sweetly hippie-pretty (constantly reminding me of women in Patagonia catalogs) and always wore stylishly colorful clothes (as opposed to me - who did gawdy colorful but was, in no way, stylish). Next to Kim, I sometimes felt oddly cynical and aggressively career-driven... which I usually don't feel much working where I do. But any time I meet someone who chose to leave graduate school, I find myself pondering how/why I stuck with it, what that says about me.



Left to Right: first highpoint and view down to Nankoweap oasis where we took our break, Mary and Jo - North Rim behind

Anyway, we followed Nankoweap Creek up the canyon for a few miles. As we gently climbed, the canyon dramatically opened up: the visible scenery before us spreading out in a series of gently rolling hills, all looking inhospitably arid. Eventually, we stopped for a snack and water-replenishing break. To our left, our first big climb beckoned... not to mention the point we officially left whatever "trail" we'd been following. Indeed, said climb was pretty much continuous scrambling up this rocky chute for 800-1000 vertical feet. The good news - it wasn't blazing hot (plus we had all just dunked our shirts and hats in the creek); the bad news - I didn't get a single picture during the climb... although I did shoot down the draw once we made the first of several highpoints. Climbing steeply, my position in the line shifted fully to the rear, shared by about five others. Even so, we were typically only 15-20 minutes behind the fast people - and I never took it personally because my pace was acceptable to me and, in my opinion, the guides. Over time, a couple of my comrades grew audibly frustrated and/or upset by the fact that they were always in the back - somehow making odd assumptions that they were missing out or being treated differently because of their relative pace. Having been involved with a lot of professionally-guided hiking trips, I can honestly say that I never felt their statements were warranted. Jerry did a great job making sure all paces were accommodated with appropriate opportunities; yes, there were some hike extension options that I - and they - did not do because of our pace... but I accepted that and was totally content with all my hiking decisions.



Left to Right: sidehilling between first highpoint and final pass (obvious in the third shot)

After arriving at our first highpoint of the day, we could - in the distance - see the major pass we were shooting for... after which it would be 99% downhill (of course, you had to love the 1% that wasn't). Although it didn't look that far away, it was. But I found the route pleasant: interesting terrain, not a lot of steep or exhausting elevation gain... and the final ten minutes across this sandy stuff were surreally beautiful. Although I thought the going was easy, several people felt otherwise - mostly owing to this moderately high-angle friction/side-hilling on this iron-colored rock that reminded me of Utah sandstone. I would estimate it took me ninety minutes or so to get to the pass, including one major stop to take off my boots and tape my bunions (which, at the time, I predicted were actively bleeding... but they weren't). Just as I arrived at the pass, the fast people were leaving on one of the aforementioned hike extension options: climbing this crazy butte to the right of the pass. Looking at said summit, I knew I couldn't handle the route because there was (as later reported by Jackie number one) EXTREME exposure: super-steep, loose-rock side-hilling where, if you fell, the run-out was limited - resulting in death or serious injury. Nevertheless, Jerry (ecstatic once the traverse was successfully over) exclaimed that he got more people on that crazy summit today than the total number he'd gotten up there over his entire career guiding this trip. Meanwhile, I sat in a tiny spot of shade at the pass, eating my PBJ sandwich and cookies alongside the small crowd from the end of the line... plus guide

Jed. Within five minutes, Martha and Faye (who took the boats to Kwagunt and were hiking the opposite direction as us) popped over the pass and, upon hearing all was well, continued on their merry way. After twenty minutes (no sign of the fast people), Jed suggested we start heading down.



Left to Right: pass looking left, right (i.e. crazy butte), north (i.e. North Rim), south (i.e. chute down which we scrambled)

Descending the chute was pretty insane for the first hundred vertical feet. Consequently, I spent much of it on my ass. After this point, the way was a steady stream of big rocks and boulders for twenty minutes, requiring a lot of full-body lowering; indeed, my arms got equally worked out on this trip with scrambling AND paddling. From then on, I would say the chute was more like a 90% pleasant draw all the way until the point where it entered Kwagunt proper. At several points, we passed these amazingly lumpy boulders that I should have known were stromatolites (fossilized bacterial mats, akin to the extant goo I study in Yellowstone)... but thankfully Jed identified them, much to my apparent glee. Our only major hiking issue came JUST as we were about to hit Kwagunt Creek: this big (20-30 feet) drop mini-cliff, likely affiliated with the extensive fault we'd been hiking along. Backtracking, we located a cairn that pointed us up and over this super-steep descending hogback; once on its ridgeline, we walked briefly before easily descending to Kwagunt proper. Of course, while making some full-body move (i.e. sitting down and then lowering myself), I set my pack on some crazy cactus. Jackie number two, one of the assistants (a retired elementary school teacher - which meant I absolutely loved her like my mom), and I spent five minutes hand-pulling as many pricklers as we could before proceeding. Of course, I should note that I had suffered several other bad foliage encounters today, two of which had drawn blood; most plants (cacti or not) in the canyon bear incredible thorns or have very sharp leaves. Although it was tempting to want to wear long pants (which I had not - at least not today), two others seriously ripped their pants open on today's hike because of foliage and five-pointing down rocks.



Left to Right: (top) down big chute, crazy butte in third shot; (bottom) stromatolite, entering Kwagunt

Once we found a pretty shelf of limestone in the shade, Jed insisted we take a break to eat and drink. He then surprised and/or disappointed most of us by commenting that we only had two more hours to go. Where a few others sustained hard trips out (including one bad fall that incurred a knee injury), I truly enjoyed dancing down Kwagunt - as it were. Like the creek in Nankoweap, Kwagunt was small and shallow - but there was zero trail... just sand, limestone shelves, and boulders (small to large). With Jed's approval, I took off on my own - half-running down the creek-bed, sometimes jumping over it from side to side, sometimes jumping (dangerously, given my ankle - I'm sure) from rock to rock... not caring about my route - just moving quickly and seamlessly. Who knows why I responded to this style of hiking? I certainly wouldn't have predicted this had you explained what the route was like. But there was something more intellectually challenging about it... not to mention the fact that the route was mine to make up, something that apparently appeals to me. Running and leaping, I got WAY ahead of everyone... eventually coming to this widening area I knew was close to the Colorado. Here, I decided to wait because Jed had warned me that the creek would turn left as we came to the canyon mouth - meanwhile, our camp was right. Within twenty minutes, fast people were the first to appear and so I joined Kim - who picked up a social trail that took us straight to our lovely camp. Tonight, I did record our dinner because I liked AZRA's chosen style: prepare and cook your own steaks

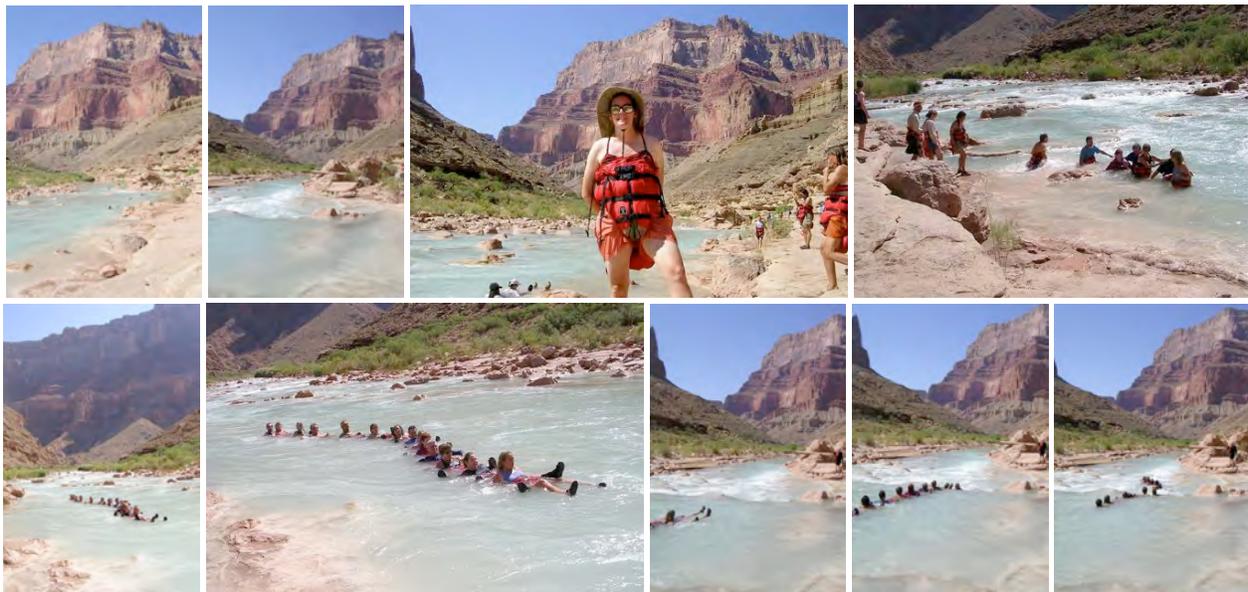
(most New York strip - with all kinds of seasoning options). The guides, of course, did make mashed potatoes and salad... but I think all companies should make clients cook their own steaks - for many reasons.



Left to Right: crowd-pleaser Little Colorado swimming hole, our buff retirees (Jim and Jackie), Jo and her stylish PFD

**October 1, 2008 - River Day Five, Kwagunt to Unkar Camp (mile 73)**

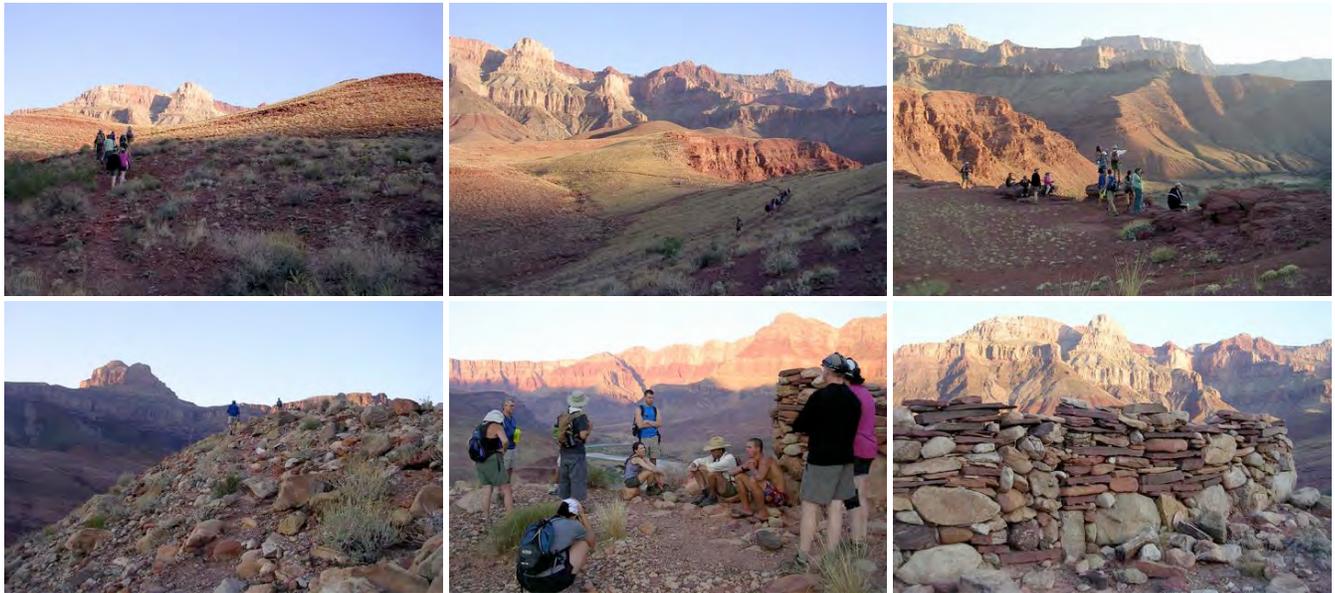
Today felt slightly more like my last trip with OARS, not only because we needed a day of rest but also because our major activity - visiting the popular, crowd-pleasing Little Colorado - is primarily a big treat. Having said that, though, I think OARS only spent, like, half an hour there. In contrast, AZRA's visit was longer, more relaxing, and more organized. Despite knowing it was going to be a short river day, I returned to the paddle-boat - hoping to do a couple big rapids that were on the potential menu. But during the five miles between Kwagunt and the Little Colorado, there was no major whitewater. Although I - and probably everyone else - really enjoyed our visit to the Little Colorado, I was surprised how crowded it was this time: at least three big parties (commercial and private) overlapped with us. Indeed, I learned on this trip that the park service has recently doubled the number of private parties that can now run the Colorado (while holding commercials constant). Today - and for the next week - it felt REALLY crowded on the river... both while camping and doing any off-river activity (be they popular, short crowd-pleasers or more remote, difficult hikes... as had begun the trend with yesterday's big traverse). Making matters worse, the park service has some requirement about how all parties have to camp within a certain zone prior to changing out members at Phantom Ranch. During today's jaunt at the Little Colorado, Jerry learned that something like seven parties would be vying for the four decent camps closest to Phantom tonight. To relieve pressure, he pulled back our plans - to the point we camped upstream of the big clog. But I digress...



Left to Right: all shots - swimming the rapid, me and my diaper PFD, the Martha Express

Pulling up to river left, we parked our boats next two other parties - this time along the main Colorado (as you are no longer allowed to physically pull up into the Little Colorado, which we did with OARS). As before, we were encouraged to wear our PFD's if we wanted to swim any rapids. This time, we hiked up fifteen minutes farther than before, stopping for an hour at this big swimming hole and jumping rock where we could enjoy the light blue river without our PFD's. Although this stop may have been motivated by the hope that other parties would move on, there were still plenty of people by the rapid-swimming area when we finally relocated. After being given directions about floating this small rapid (wearing our PFD's like diapers), I was either the first or second down. Although OARS had let us float some of the Little Colorado, none had any actual waves; consequently, I think today counts as my first time "in" a rapid. While the approach went smoother than expected, being in waves that were taller than my head was disconcerting - and I definitely sucked some water. But I did it a second time, surprised at how different the same rapid could feel. After exhausting the rapid on an individual basis, most people (excluding me and another guy - because we wanted pictures) joined the "Martha Express" - see above. I was surprised how well they did (Martha WHOOO-HOOO-ing all the way), especially through the rapid. And then we made our way back to the boats, continuing downstream with the intent of camping somewhere in the Unkar Delta - which I learned represented the largest and likely year-round Pueblo settlement in the canyon. En route, we passed a number of obvious Hopi salt mines, the Hopi being

the only and most direct descendents of what are called either Pueblo or Anasazi. These facts - and the far cooler temperatures - added to my heightened sense of appreciation as we came to this vastly open region (also called Palisades or Furnace Flats, for obvious reasons - especially in the summer). This area also marks the first sight of other noteworthy things, including the Grand Canyon supergroup and park structures like the Desert View Watchtower. While floating a few riffles in the vicinity of Tanner rapid (a class 4), Harlan invited anyone who wanted to "swim" a safe rapid to jump overboard. Although no one immediately took him up on it, Mary decided to go for it at the next riffle and literally jumped off the bow - making it look too safe and easy (although she readily admitted it was VERY cold). From our perspective, Mary's head appeared to be serenely bobbing between waves that were two or three feet high and eight to ten feet apart (i.e. she wasn't, like, taking it in the face - as was the case in the Little Colorado). Although I (and a few others) hoped we'd camp just past Unkar (a class 6-7), Jerry decided to camp right above it.



Left to Right: (top) hiking to Unkar rapid overlook; (bottom) hiking to and visiting Pueblo "fort" (granary?)

After we set up camp, Jerry took us on a short (ninety minutes, including lots of stops) hike on an obvious path - first up this hill overlooking Unkar rapid, then across a ridgeline to this "fort" (labeled a granary on my sources - but described more like a watchtower by our guides). This hike was surprisingly scenic, given my previously less-than-stellar impressions of this very different-looking region of the canyon. Once again, though, we crisscrossed another big party en route. During the hike, Jerry pointed across the river to this impossibly tall-looking summit: that's what we're doing tomorrow (the Tabernacle). I can't remember if he qualified things then or later - but the reality was that the Tabernacle only represented tomorrow's morning activity (i.e. however far you could get up in two hours). Looking at the crazy-butte-like summit, I knew - for reasons mostly concerning exposure - that there was NO way I was making it up that sucker. Nevertheless, I could see areas along the lower ridge that appealed to me; consequently, I had no issues with Jerry's expectations and offerings. We returned in near darkness to camp, enjoying what was my favorite meal on this trip - albeit because I wasn't expecting it to be so good: grilled pork, jalapeno grits, and this salad with a whole mess of tortilla shavings.



Left to Right: Unkar sunset, rock wall detail, dusk view across to Tabernacle (indicated) - tomorrow's goal

**October 2, 2008 - River (Sort of) Day Six, Unkar to Below Neville Rapid (mile 76)**

Today, as suggested above, our schedule seemed dictated by the pressures of having too many other parties (particularly privates) vying for the limited number of camps just before Phantom Ranch. Therefore, instead of making more river miles toward that goal, we throttled back - doing a morning scramble of the Tabernacle and then a self-guided trip up this slot canyon by our camp - to less than one hour total on the river. Nevertheless, I joined the paddle-boat again, knowing we were going to raft two moderately big ones (both class 6): Unkar and Neville. Indeed, we hit Unkar less than two minutes after getting on the rafts, which is especially pleasant (NOT) when the sun may be up (barely) but is far from striking you or warming the air. Shortly thereafter, we pulled over on river right, the route up the Tabernacle fairly obvious. While it did appear closer, the final fourth of the climb still looked (and was) really exposed and so I did not, like, change my mind about going for the summit. Ultimately, too, I was challenged just getting to my stated goal (this lower promontory) given that we had to cross and

scramble an exposed ridgeline within the first mile. Given Jerry's two-hour-up limit, the fast people started quickly at ten - taking off before I was even done taping my toes and organizing my pack. Eventually, I took off alone - the last of the clients (save a few who didn't do any of the route because of aforementioned knee injury). As was par for the course during every hike, I scrambled a short cliffy section within five minutes - after which the obvious trail then meandered a bit, zigzagging up to the longer exposed ridgeline. Here, Kim caught up to me and coaxed me along - although I had to remind her that I had to be able to get off this thing without her encouragement since I was going to be on my own shortly. Indeed, there were three really bad spots I likely wouldn't have crossed had it just been me and my fears.



Left to Right: (top) looking up at ridge, trailhead; (bottom) Tabernacle summit, on ridge with Jackie number two, Unkar Delta

After the ridgeline, the trail meandered up more forgiving scrubby hills. Despite all my dragging (even on easy stuff), I made it to my goal - which amounted to climbing about 800 feet (vs. 2400 to Tabernacle's summit). There, Jackie number two had also called it a day. After sharing an orange, we headed down - covering each other equally on the bad parts. We arrived back at the boats around noon. Having intentionally planned to return early, I headed over to this adjacent slot canyon that Jerry had recommended for anyone wanting a more leisurely day. Getting to it (i.e. around this big corner) was a major bitch, though: whacking through dense tamarisk, a couple scrambling moves, a little route-finding... but once I found the big wide mouth, it was easy going. As vowed, I ambled up half an hour, enjoyed a little sitting/staring break in the shade, and then ambled back - coinciding with the planned return of the fast people. Although the canyon had a few bona fide narrows, its most impressive feature was its rocks - particularly the Dox (a member of the supergroup), which seemed impossibly hard to have been weathered so curvaceously. Although many fast people did make it to the summit, a few backed off because there apparently was some difficult, steep boulder-field between where I stopped and the final exposed summit pyramid. All I can say: it must have been pretty damn challenging given how hearty the fast people seemed.



Left to Right: daunting approach to Dox slot canyon, in canyon, crazy amalgam rock in canyon

After regrouping and enjoying lunch, we got back on the rafts and floated a mile - including paddling exciting Neville rapid - before pulling over on river left to camp. For the first time on this trip, we arrived to camp before three... which was really appreciated because it gave everyone time to organize and dry gear, fully bathe, and relax on what was a stupendous beach of sand. As previously stated, though, Jerry encouraged us all to take an optional, self-guided hike up 75-mile canyon, a short slot canyon with lots of Shinumo quartzite - an unusual mix of marbled purple, gold, and white. After setting up my tent, I headed over there, catching up with a few other passengers after fifteen minutes of hiking upriver over rocks along the upper beach. The 75-mile canyon was narrower and had taller walls than the Dox slot canyon by the Tabernacle. Looking at the splotchy rocks, a debate ensued about whether the purple and gold was just a superficial stain effect or, rather, deep throughout the rock. Still can't say I know the answer to that question, though. In any event, most of us hiked to the head of the canyon (this twenty-foot semi-vertical wall), where Jerry had suggested we probably would want to turn around. For some reason, though, we decided to scramble it (which wasn't too bad). Although the "top" (i.e. where we stopped) offered views down on the serpentine canyon and across to the Tabernacle, there wasn't any more slot canyon... just open, scrubby land

beneath higher buttes and towers of Grand Canyon proper. After returning to camp, we enjoyed fish tacos - my least favorite meal on the trip... which means I had lots of chips and salsa with guacamole. Being on such an open beach, the wind was bad most of the night; having camped in the most open corridor, I - around midnight - found myself out there buck naked (as I tended to sleep as such) trying to turn my tent 90° so that the widest side wasn't facing the wind.



Left to Right: Neville camp, the rest are 75-mile canyon... note purple and gold Shinumo quartzite, labeled Tabernacle

**October 3, 2008 - River Day Seven, Neville to Boucher Rapid (mile 97)**

Today was the big change-out at Phantom Ranch, where we'd lose eight (including paddle-captain Harlan) and gain four (including new paddle-captain Somer). Because of the bottleneck, we were still about two hours from Phantom - which made things more difficult than I suspected was normal - specifically because we had to get our departing hikers on the trail as early as possible. It should be noted that AZRA expects people hiking in or out at Phantom to carry all their gear (which means bringing a big pack, stored separately on the boats); Jo, however, independently rented a mule to carry her gear out (for about \$50). One of these years I do plan on doing an exchange at Phantom... but I think I'll follow Jo's example. Anyway, Jerry had us up half an hour earlier today to ensure we were at Phantom by ten (which we were). Because today would include Horn Creek rapid, the ONLY big one I wanted to do (and was very insistent about), I was on the paddle-boat all day. Consequently, there are limited pictures. Despite knowingly going on a paddle-option trip (and stating my paddling interest level was between 50-75%), I maintained some reservations about paddling big rapids on this trip. As alluded to, these reservations stemmed from two sources: feeling slightly overwhelmed after running the Chilko's Bidwell (my first class 5 using the traditional system) and Lava Canyon (15 miles of continuous class 3-4), and enduring (with Allison) the disappointing Futaleufu, the first time I walked away from big water (fortunately, we had the choice there). Prior to and enhanced by our Fu trip, Allison and I had developed three criteria for paddling class 5 (or 10) rapids: (a) spectacular/experienced paddling team (as good as on the Selway), (b) excellent paddling captain (as good as on the Selway), (c) and the water level had to be "medium" for the given river. Today, I had to put these requirements to the test - because to do Horn Creek (an 8-9 given today's water), I would have to do a few class 9-10's... the most significant being Hance. Of course, Hance was menacing for a more tangible reason: in researching recent rafting deaths on this river, I discovered that the only one had been in Hance... albeit a drowning in high spring run-off. Nonetheless, it did not sit well with me: particularly because Hance would be our first rapid, less than a mile from camp. Still, all my class 5/10 paddling requirements were met by today's notably all-male team. Although I could write a fairly long essay about what it's like to paddle with six strong, fun-loving, crazy guys, I will only indulge the following illustrative anecdote: the timer (front, left position) changed a few times between a couple of the guys - but both developed this useful but hilarious strategy of yelling "STROKE, STROKE, STROKE" with each move they made through the big sections. Riding through the crazy water hearing the likes of Rey (who also maintained gorgeous, long dreadlocks) yelling like some insane Viking cracked me up - and even more because he (and most timers) sped up as we approached the rapid tongue. There, they'd get smacked in the face by some giant wall - their words garbling. As such, I paddled the following rapids before the exchange at Phantom: Hance (9-10), Sockdolager (9), Grapevine (8), and Zoroaster (8).

At Phantom, we were given ninety minutes on our own. After going to the café/store and buying/drinking the mandatory lemonade, I called my check-in list - actually catching Bryan in his office this time around... and getting teased about my testosterone paddle-fest. I then returned to the insane riverfront area, where four huge parties were parked side-by-side-by-side (indeed, I don't think there was any beachfront left). It also seemed as though there were WAY more hikers this time, all arriving and looking exhausted, thirsty, and hot. After changing people out, the paddle-boat altered substantially - losing half its paddlers and gaining a new captain, Somer - an early twenty-something who became guide-certified when she was in highschool. Although a few of today's remaining rapids were rated 9-10, I had to suspend a few of my three big requirements. I did trust the new team because I'd paddled with them all on the upper canyon; indeed, AZRA's policy is that newly arrived people at Phantom don't paddle because there are so many big, dangerous rapids immediately thereafter (apparently, this rule came about after a paddle-boat containing inexperienced clients flipped twice during the afternoon after Phantom). Given that AZRA had impressed me thus far (including with this rule), I had to trust that Somer would be as good as Harlan. Although she was, we did have to warm up to Somer a little... and I don't say that in a mean way. Somer was delightfully young; as

such, she didn't have as much to say as Harlan right off the bat... plus, she was arriving mid-way through a trip where, after Phantom Ranch, I (now 41, and looking like it) was the youngest passenger. After a couple days, Somer was as lively and talkative in her own way. And, bottom line, she was as good as Harlan in terms of her skill as paddle-captain - clearly taking us through the largest water on the river in a safe and confident manner. But that first hour - which included Horn Creek right off the bat - felt slightly off and less clear for some of us. As on my first trip, Horn Creek (which became my favorite rapid, even though I knew nothing about it before getting smacked by it) surprised me and a few others. Before (at 8,000 cfs), it felt like a giant but relatively smooth low-angle waterfall after the first big wave hit; today (at 12,000 cfs), it felt weirder and more jerky. We got pounded from a couple directions after the first hit; it felt like we were not going down straight, possibly because it was our first effort as a team today and we probably were a little rusty. Somer also called turns a little different than Harlan and was initially quieter. For me, though, I left one of my feet out of the floor pocket - something I did on the smaller upper rapids because your knees tended to wrench uncomfortably after a long time in the pocket stance. Unfortunately, Horn Creek was so violent - with force coming from odd directions - that my loose knee slammed directly into the metal gear frame in the center of the boat. I knew, from the moment it hit, that it was BAD - so bad I thought it might jeopardize future hikes. Right after Horn Creek, we took our lunch break and I inspected the knee: the impact had split this deep, inch-long wound to the point I felt it might need stitches (seriously, it looked like a major knife-wound). The area around the injury hurt incredibly - to the point I probably bruised the patella (if not chipped it). While the tissue never discolored, it still hurts when I, like, try to crawl on my knees... but it has improved a lot. In terms of the flesh wound, I did a lot of cleaning right off the bat - but then I applied one of those really strong, gel-like oval bandages made for blisters. Amazingly, it stayed on (despite being almost constantly wet during the day) for two days - my cleaning interval... and the wound pretty much closed nicely within a week - not nearly as troubling or frustrating to deal with as all the aforementioned calf wounds. Also during lunch, Martha had us all excited and/or daunted about the remaining rapids of the afternoon: Granite (9-10, the afternoon's most dangerous... but her favorite because it just said "DESERT STORM" when you entered all the chaotic waves) and Hermit (9, huge waves but very safe). Just as we were wrapping up, the first of many private rafts and kayaks started appearing - and so Jerry, not wanting to feel like we were in a traffic jam, called an impromptu hike up this unnamed side-canyon. Although most fast people followed him for the entire 20-minute duration of his ascent, the rest of us (me included) stopped ten minutes up... after a big full-body scramble - mostly because we found this luxuriously shady spot in the middle of stunning Zoroaster granite and Vishnu schist.



Left to Right: insanity at Phantom Ranch, Bouchet camp - drying out the wet sleeping bag

Of course, when we returned to the boats, the beginning of ANOTHER gigantic private party began appearing. In the end, Granite (about two miles downstream from lunch) was unanimously voted as the best rapid of the day (even by me) and we did an exceptional job executing all the moves. Although some of my co-paddlers doubted Somer's assertion that we were her best team, I actually think she was being honest - given that I have been on other "sexy river" trips with total beginners who sucked and/or become totally gripped in whitewater. Sadly, I think that a fair number of those kinds of people are probably attracted to rafting the Colorado. Anyway - shortly after Granite, we hit Hermit... although even Martha said the waves weren't as big as she'd hoped. Although Jerry was aiming to camp above Boucher rapid (class 4), I was under the impression that the recent high-output dam events had radically changed many of the beaches in this area. My recollection is that the upper Boucher camp didn't look so hot but the lower camp had been, like, totally restored - and thus we camped there. Arriving around four, I quickly discovered that my sleeping bag was half soaked; given that all the boats had been inundated during the big water, there is a chance that a few pinprick-sized holes (notably in the vicinity of three patched areas) allowed said water in. Alternatively, I didn't stuff the bag properly - something I've never done in all my years of rafting. For the remainder of the trip, I made an effort to stuff my sleeping bag down farther, basically folding over the pinprick hole area - and this seemed to solve the problem. Needless to say, I was initially concerned the bag wouldn't dry... but, given a warm breeze, it was bone-dry in about ninety minutes. Dinner that night: cheeseburgers, brats, baked beans, and these two gigantic chocolate chip cookie bars baked in the Dutch ovens... DELICIOUS. Unfortunately, the warm wind picked up a lot as the sun went down - sending superfine sand into the air during what was an ultimately frustrating night (hmmm... is that grilled brat crunchy or is that sand in my mouth?) - with a few more tents going up than usual.

#### **October 4, 2008 - River Day Eight, Boucher to Tent City Camp (mile 116.5)**

Today was an equally huge whitewater paddling day, including Crystal (the first one of the day) and the gigantic Gem series. Given that yesterday's team stayed on (probably because Jerry gave an appropriately scary overview of Crystal, arguably one of the largest, longest, and most dangerous rapids on the river), I decided all my requirements were met - and I went for it. Totally worth it. Of course, today's weather was uncooperative and/or ominous much of the time: cloudy and gray for probably an hour and then outright rain for a couple hours. But I digress... Within thirty minutes of leaving camp, we pulled over on river right to scout Crystal - one of only two scouts AZRA did on this whole trip. In contrast with their later scout of Lava Falls (which they openly said was mostly for picture-taking and show), I had the sense that they actually scouted Crystal (which only developed in 1966, after major flooding and debris flow) for real... because this is a notoriously mutable rapid - a lot of rockfall on either side of the river. But, as before, the reality of Crystal is that - if run correctly - it is not a very exciting

rapid. Crystal is composed of an upper and lower section, the scouting vantage on river right. My recollection of the previous run with OARS was that we crossed left fast - and I know for sure we landed the boat between the upper and lower section on river left so that Matt (our oarsman) could shoot video of the other boats; we then powered back into the rapid and ran the lower section right. This time, AZRA ran completely right - and by right I mean that we basically snuck down the absolute right side of the river, essentially parking the raft in several mini-eddies with the nose into the bank and the stern angled out into the river. Our style running it - a lot of slow, but well-executed moves with many stops - reminded me a lot of running the Selway's infamous Ladle. A couple Colorado newbie's, their hearts set on running this notoriously difficult rapid, seemed disappointed by the nearly dry run. Of course, being in the absolute back of the boat, I actually remember this run more than my first time because I was the closest (other than Somer) to the RAGING, giant hole that we were trying to avoid (it was probably 30 feet away but HUGE and definitely raging). The lower run was non-monumental... other than it pretty much started to rain as we were celebrating our well-executed paddling. After Crystal, we rafted the more-exciting-feeling Gem series (nearly all rated 6-7), which were - like most of yesterday's rapids - hydraulically large but fairly safe: Tuna, Sapphire, Emerald, Ruby, Serpentine, and Waltenburg being the biggest. In between said series, we pulled over on river right (I have no idea where) and ate lunch in the rain. Jerry recommended we all warm up in this mini-cave, produced by an overhanging series of ledges. Although I wasn't too cold, a lot of people were. In my opinion, it was better to take off all the wet clothing (which a lot of people didn't do) and wear back-up stuff from our daybags (which, again, is why I was struggling to fit all my gear in there). Plus, the rocks were actually warm, which was nice for bare feet.



Left to Right lunchstop refuge and then Garnet Canyon images, note rock with mica flakes

After lunch, the skies stopped spitting and it became a decent - but still overcast - afternoon. Around mile 115, we pulled over on river left for a moderate (i.e. just over two hours) hike up Garnet Canyon. As always, this entailed some scrambling: a fairly long section of granite and schist that was climbed immediately out of the boats. At the top, we gained a small intermediate plateau, notably still below the Tapeats. We walked along an obvious and generally level path for fifteen minutes before gently climbing - eventually through the Tapeats, the crux of Garnet proper. Most interesting along the way: bona fide rocks with silver mica flakes and this incredible floor that looked like an elaborate mosaic - small rocks of every color embedded in what seemed like red cement. I am fairly certain that the name "Garnet" refers only to the predominant color in the canyon - not the presence of said gem. Although the final slot sections were pretty, they were not as pretty as - say - Deer Creek Narrows (also in the Tapeats). After returning to the boats, we floated fifteen minutes before looking for a camp. Ultimately, Jerry spent a long time exploring what became our camp, returning with some frustration about whether this was the right decision. At the time, though, his motives for needing to use this site seemed uncertain. As the rest of us soon discovered, space was so limited that we were going to be pretty much sleeping cheek to jowl... plus, most sites were sloping, all camp-able area pretty much on this big tall sand heap. A few people seemed upset by whatever was driving Jerry to INSIST on camping here, although I can't say I was that frustrated (hell, it was one of my best nights of sleep). But it was the WORST night to have to be crammed in like sardines: with rainfall imminent, everyone was going to have to put up a tent, further straining the space. Making matters worse, the guides put the groover WAY on the opposite side of camp (i.e. you had to stumble down a hill to the kitchen and then actively scramble up rocks to the groover). After a fair bit of complaining, the pee bucket was moved to the center of the "tent city" - where it was definitely filled overnight. Bloody Mary's (i.e. V8 and vodka) were also presented to appease the grumbling campers... and contribute to the overnight pee volume.

#### October 5, 2008 - River Day Nine, Tent City to Owl Eyes Camp (mile 134)

This morning, it was finally made clear why Jerry was so insistent on this crazy little camp: we were just upstream from Elves' Chasm, a very popular short side-canyon with a pretty waterfall and pool. Had he told us this when he said we were camping here, there would have been less moaning. Before breakfast, we set out for a twenty-minute hike to the mouth of Elves, which required scrambling and side-hilling over lots of sharp rocks. As before, getting into Elves was equally treacherous: with rocks smoothed down by so many visitors that they provided zero traction. Although recent flooding in this side-canyon has brought down a lot of debris into the pool, the guides found a deep spot and a few of us (not me, as usual) did climb up the crazy rocks

by the waterfall and jump - despite the fact that it was barely seven, no actual sun had hit the main canyon, and the pool water felt FUCKING FREEZING (although the air temperature wasn't bad). After egg-cheese-butter-fried bagels, I decided it was time to take on the role of paddle-boat timer... at least for the morning. Indeed, there was a fair bit of turn-around on the paddle-boat - with four gone and four newcomers (i.e. in the sense that I had not paddled with them before). Big rapids before lunch included Forster, Fossil, and Specter (all class 6-7). As timer, I tried to do the Viking stroke call... but the walls of water hitting me directly were too big. There were moments in all those rapids where I saw nothing... although, surprisingly, I never felt like I was in danger of being thrown out of the boat.



Left to Right: (top) tent city, Elves' Chasm, clearing skies an hour after leaving camp; (bottom) Bedrock Rapid and Canyon

Lunch was taken by Bedrock Rapid, after which a moderate (i.e. just over two hours) hike was enjoyed up Bedrock Canyon. Jerry called this a non-epiphany hike (i.e. we were simply going one hour in and then turning around); I stopped 75% up because I wanted to take my time going down. Although much of Bedrock involved perfectly civil walking, there were four places where you scrambled intently - including a 15-20 foot wall where we actually used a rope. When I returned to the rafts (where a few people had remained, having chosen not to hike), there was gossip about three naked privates in lawn-chairs on the giant slab of rock that sits in the middle of the river (hence, Bedrock Rapid). Later in the trip, I learned that this party was composed of beloved Alsek guide Sam and a newly married couple-friend of his. Needless to say, I emailed Sam after the trip and was told: yes, the couple had been naked... but he (he insisted) was not. By the time we actually ran Bedrock, I observed that there definitely were three people in lawn chairs - all clothed. Knowing Bedrock and downstream Deubendorff were both complicated class 7-8 rapids, I had ceded the timer position - uninterested in that level of stress. From my now-rear position, though, I was disturbed to watch some paddlers who were not following instructions. One person even took their paddle out of the water during Deubendorff to physically hold onto/crouch in the boat, contributing to what I felt was a funkier run of said rapid. These observations would unfortunately define my future feelings about the paddle-boat during Lava Falls. Indeed, I'd finally found a chink in my class 5/10 requirements on this trip. Shortly after Deubendorff, we passed Stone Creek - which felt eerie because I learned, right before this trip, that an older man on a commercial trip had fallen to his death there in late August... tripping from a seemingly straightforward trail. Knowing AZRA often included this hike in their repertoire (as evidenced by pictures on their website), I was anxious about the possibility we would hike there. Thankfully, Jerry knew that a lot of us wanted to do Tapeats-Thunder River, and thus he chose to emphasize said hike instead. With that as tomorrow's goal, we camped at Owl Eyes camp (located under this big wall with two giant concavities). To many of us, this was our favorite campsite... probably because there was lots of space, it was scenic, and we'd just suffered through tent city.



Left to Right: looking up Tapeats from in creek, scramble up to top of Tapeats, looking down, cliffy edge along Tapeats

### October 6, 2008 - River Day Ten (Sort of), Tapeats-Thunder River Hike, Owl Eyes to ?? (mile 135-ish)

After rafting less than a mile, we arrived at the mouth of the Tapeats, which had been visible from camp (at least as a shadowy indentation in the wall). There, our companions from the Nankoweap-Kwagunt traverse had already parked their boats and were on the trail (we only briefly ran into them at Thunder Falls). Parking off to the side, most of us were not dismayed. In

contrast with what I thought would happen today (based on Roger's account of his trip to this area - where they did a thru-hike all the way to Deer Creek/Falls), we only did an in-out hike to either Thunder Falls (i.e. those wanting a more leisurely pace) or Surprise Valley (i.e. fast people). Looking back, I have mixed feelings about not having the opportunity to do the thru-hike - particularly given that we ultimately never hiked Deer on this trip. But I was definitely wowed by Tapeats and Thunder - even though my pictures don't even come close to doing this place justice. Of course, this hike was my greatest nemesis going in. I knew, from several web accounts, that there was going to be a long (some said a whole mile) cliff-edge trail. Unfortunately, I cannot dispute the general tone of these reports: the trail was extremely challenging for me because of my fear of heights.



Left to Right: more shots from cliffy trail along lower Tapeats Creek gorge (you can actually see the creek in last shots)

Immediately after getting off the boats and changing into hiking boots, we had to ford the lower Tapeats - which may look small in that picture but it was upper-thigh-deep on me... and up to the waist on short people. And thus began my odd love affair with squishing along in totally wet boots. Crossing the creek, we immediately ascended this rudimentary trail that definitely reminded me of that to Aasgard - albeit for only about 600 feet up. The goal: get to the top of the Tapeats - where the fun began: hiking right along the edge of these high ledges for at least half a mile. To your right (on the way up), the deep Tapeats Creek gorge is visible - sometimes straight over, sometimes after a short careening section. In any event, you DEFINITELY did not want to trip anywhere on this route. People told me that this section is worse than anything along Stone Creek (i.e. where the aforementioned guy had tripped and fallen to his death), which I didn't want to know or think about. For the duration of the cliffy edge section, I stayed close to Somer, who assured me it would get better fast. And it did - because as you are hiking (basically flat), the gorge is angling up (i.e. with every step forward on the way up, the exposure dramatically diminishes). Unfortunately, the way down felt harder to me for the same reason (i.e. with every step forward on the way down, the exposure dramatically increases). Once we met the creek and easily forded it (by now, I actually wanted to get my feet wet), the trail was fairly civil the rest of the way. Hiking up what was usually an open valley, the trail meandered over broad, low ridgelines or right along the creek (sometimes requiring crazy scrambling to get around rock ledges). Probably half a mile from the place where you start following Thunder River, we had to ford the upper Tapeats - which was definitely big, fast water (as high as my knees). Jerry spotted us all on that section. Immediately thereafter, we arrived at a major backcountry camping area, complete with a big solar toilet. And then we started climbing earnestly along Thunder River - which seemed like a continuous set of waterfalls raging down this long, steep draw. Much to my surprise (after reading the web accounts, that is), there were some crazy edgy cliffy sections here too... but not nearly so ugly as those above the lower gorge.



Left to Right: (top) middle area, fords, halfway to falls, heading up to Surprise Valley; (bottom) lizard, falls, monkeyflower

Although Thunder Falls, the source of which shoots directly out of the wall (like, right there above you) from some kind of aquifer, were stupendous to see, feel, and listen to, they were challenging to get close to because they were heavily shrouded by a lot of dense foliage (including mint, watercress, maidenhair fern, and scarlet monkeyflower). Even so, social trails abounded over the roots and several of us ultimately settled on this location right below the main falls. I have seen lots of other pictures of these falls from some more distant and higher viewpoint; I can't say I know where that is, having been where

I was on this trail. In any event, I ate my lunch as the fast people started headed up to Surprise Valley (basically at the skyline in the picture above), Jed leading. Indeed, I think some of them seemed surprised "we" actually caught up to them so quickly. As I started heading down, I ran into four backpackers descending from Surprise; they claimed there was some disoriented guy up there who was dehydrated and lost (???). For most of the trip down to the camping area, I hiked with this other couple. Jerry caught up with us as we arrived at the big Tapeats ford, and then fast people returning from Surprise began to appear. In brief conversations with some of them, I had the sense that few went beyond "the top" (i.e. the skyline in the picture) - only surveying the "big flat dry desert" (i.e. Surprise). Because one can dayhike down to upper Surprise from the North Rim, I wasn't hell-bent on hiking there today. Shortly thereafter, Jerry took us all to some water-slide along the Tapeats. Kim, though, knew I needed a patient guide to cross the treacherous section - and probably would prefer it if there weren't hoards of people passing me; thus, she (after one slide) and I headed down long before the crowd was done playing. As I said, though, down was harder - not only because I was more aware of the exposure but also because there were several ledge areas that you actively descended - all the while looking down into the seemingly bottomless gorge. But I made it... we all made it by around three. Given that camp was only a couple miles downstream, we were unloading gear by four - pleasant for relaxing, bathing, and organizing gear.



Left to Right: Kim manning oars, Deer Falls area (falls in shadow, trail in green), falls proper, narrowest river point

**October 7, 2008 - River Day Eleven (Sort of), Kanab Canyon and Whispering Falls, mile 135-ish to ?? (mile 145-ish)**

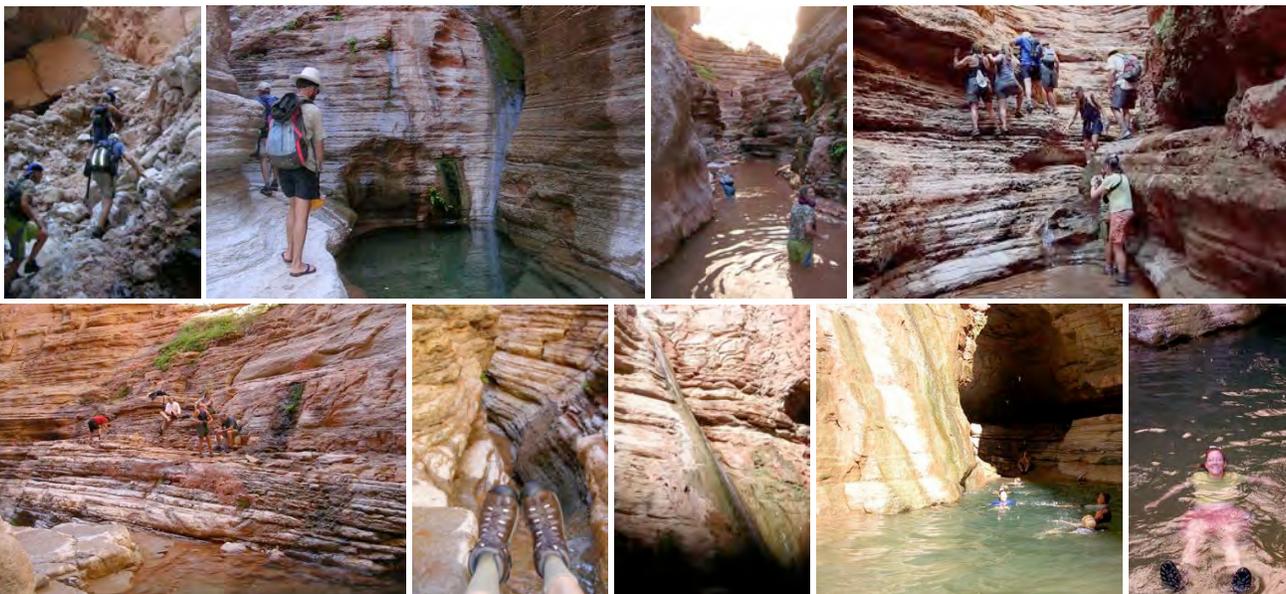
Jerry's thoughts about today had palpably evolved - a recurring theme for the next several days, which frustrated a few of us (including me). Indeed, Jerry seemed preoccupied with both trying to avoid other parties and making sure we saw new and/or off-the-beaten-path places; I suspect, too, he was getting pressure to make sure as many people as possible could complete hikes in provided times. Frankly, I didn't care about these issues. The days where we pulled up to another party's boats were fine because we barely ran into them on land. As for whether crowd-pleasing standards or hole-in-the-walls are better, I think that's hit or miss: e.g. North Canyon knocks the socks off South Canyon, but Nankoweap-Kwagunt knocks the socks off all upper canyon hikes; meanwhile, Deer Creek is equal to Tapeats/Thunder and today's hike (Kanab) remains one of my favorites because I had zero expectations (which would likely please Jerry to no end - and justify his stance). Of course, I wasn't sure whether Jerry or Martha proposed Kanab... but Martha definitely sold it. Incidentally, Kanab was used as an escape route by Powell's second expedition; Roger also did a fascinating traverse that included scrambling Kanab all the way to the rim. Anyway - I rode as a passenger with Kim, rafting a couple tiny rapids and the narrowest part of the river, and quietly passing Deer Creek Falls (which looked smaller than I remember them). Yesterday, Jerry had suggested we were going to do a quick hike there to the Narrows. Martha, though, went on about what a religious experience Kanab was - with a strong emphasis on this side canyon and Whispering Falls (sometimes known as Slide of Susurrus). Perhaps as a result of this, Jerry likely decided that a lot of people would want to do this - and thus we should forego Deer to provide a longer period of time for Kanab. Even so, Jerry made a blunt speech about the Slide/Whispering option, correctly suggesting that some people - even with the extended time - would not be able to make said goal. Sadly, this was not only true - but the same people who didn't make it were the same ones who seemed the most bothered by their relative pace. As for foregoing Deer, I have mixed feelings: having hiked it before, I knew I could live without it on this trip. But knowing how fantastic it is, I felt bad for people who hadn't been there before... especially the ones who didn't make it to Whispering (equally awesome, but in a completely different way). Of course, the real irony: there was no one parked at Deer but you can imagine Kanab...



Left to Right: entering Kanab, near first epiphany, evolution rocks, Martha waiting by Slide entrance, Slide stairs

Yes - our usual commercial buddies were parked at Kanab. Jerry considered setting up camp - like, right now - across the river at this sub-optimal site... just to kill time while waiting for them to come out. But then he decided we should just proceed with Plan A (i.e. hike first, camp someplace nice downstream). It was around eleven when we set out, slopping immediately across deep and wide Kanab Creek. Today, I was 100% determined to make it to Whispering because there was no elevation to speak of and, given my positive experience rock/creek-hopping Kwagunt, this hike should be my cup of tea. With Martha leading, though, it was definitely a torrid pace - and I, as usual, had dawdled while taping my toes. But I caught up with them

within the hour, joining them at the first epiphany: an undercut amphitheatre reminiscent of Redwall Cavern. The route before and after this point was accurately described by Jerry as Kwagunt (++). Like Kwagunt, you were making up your own path in the context of rocks and a creek. Unlike Kwagunt, the creek and most rocks were much bigger. I spent 30% of the time IN the water (anywhere between over my ankles and to my mid-thigh). Even so, I - quoting Roger's comment about this hike - felt Kanab "was not easy, but it was my kind of canyon." While Martha and most others took an extended break, I continued up - following our super-fast guys. Within twenty minutes, the smell of marijuana overtook the slot canyon... and thus I wondered if there were things about the guys I didn't yet know. But then came the sound of women chanting... right before I stumbled into three people from the other group lying on the ground. Later, we learned that one of the women had fallen in the creek, breaking her wrist. Half an hour upstream from this situation, we all stopped at the obvious mouth of Slide Canyon. Martha, who'd caught up to everyone by now, asked that we eat our lunch here so as to wait a little longer - given that the majority of people from the other group had not yet come down. After forty minutes, we proceeded up Slide, which took another forty minutes to ascend... the first part just rocks, the second part pools and rocks. Near the end, most of the other party was descending - but ultimately we did interrupt on a few of them still trying to enjoy Whispering (oh well).



Left to Right: (top) out of darkness (scrambling, first/second pools); (bottom) into light (final pool/atrium, Whispering baptism)

The final ten minutes of climbing to the Whispering Falls atrium were the most challenging - a 15-foot wall to scramble, followed by your choice: edging along minimal ledges or full-on wading waist-deep pools. I chose the latter, uninterested in dangling off rocks where a fall would land one in the water. Better just to get in on purpose. The atrium was in shadow when we arrived, Whispering Falls murmuring down this long wall of rock - filling this big final pool where we all went swimming. More adventurous people swam across the pool to this grotto behind the falls - a great place for sex (Martha cackled). This, of course, reminded me of this salacious couple on my last trip... yes, they definitely would have LOVED to do it in the Whispering Falls grotto. We spent about an hour in the atrium, experiencing the sun's passage directly overhead. I preferred the more subtle light before it hit, though... the colors of the walls and ledges were more deep and rich. I was the first one to say I wanted to head down - causing a number of followers to decide they, too, wanted a more relaxed hike back. But, given my tendencies at Kwagunt, I mostly ran/jumped/danced/sloshed my way back. I did meet up with Jerry and Kim at the first epiphany, after which we hiked together to the canyon mouth. Here, a helicopter had landed and was loading up "pot-lady" (as stated in my journal). All I could think: if the park service posts this soon, my mother and/or Roger are going to call AZRA, assuming I fell and broke my wrist (thankfully, that didn't happen). Ironically, we were on the river before the other party, pulling into camp shortly thereafter (as they floated by - on their way to Havasu, which made Jerry happy). I have zero recollections about this camp... other than it was pleasant and, as with yesterday, we enjoyed some restful downtime.



Left to Right: helicopter evacuation at Kanab, pulling into Matkat and its narrows section... not enough pictures here!

### October 8, 2008 - River Day Twelve (Sort of), Matkat Canyon and Ledges Camp (mile 152-ish)

Today, I rode as a passenger with Faye. Although Faye (who evaded my camera completely) was one of the quietest guides, she definitely had presence... mostly because of her very distinctive voice and accent: a sort of lower-voiced, Australian

version of Katherine Hepburn. Today was an oddly necessary day in the sense that we'd just done two long back-to-back hiking days... it was time for a more leisurely afternoon. First on the agenda was a three-mile float to Matkatamiba (which, given that I'm a microbiologist, looks like Matkat-AMOEBa) Canyon. Roger, who had visited this canyon during his AZRA trip, had spoken highly of Matkat and so I had my heart set on finally seeing it. Given that our commercial group shadows had headed for Havasu today, there were ZERO boats parked at the awkward mouth (i.e. fast water and a little rapid RIGHT below, meaning fierce rowing/paddling to make it to shore). Even though I hadn't visited Matkat with OARS, I sort of consider this one a crowd-pleaser and, frankly, remain surprised we skipped it before. Parts, though, were reminiscent of the sections at the end of Saddle Canyon (above Nankoweap, done with OARS). In contrast with Saddle's narrows section, Matkat's is, like, RIGHT at the beginning and MUCH harder - requiring some fairly technical moves. There are also two routes at the narrows: the mostly dry upper section (which we took down) and the pretty wet lower section (which most of us, including me, took up). The lower section involved three major full-body chimney-ing moves - all assisted by Somer or Kim. The moves were fun but very awkward and, even though I used to be pretty good at chimney-ing in climbing class, these felt challenging. But the lower narrows section was over in less than thirty minutes (including a lot of waiting in line), the canyon fully opening into this massive amphitheatre - which we arrived at around eleven. Jerry gave us until two to do whatever we wanted here: options included staying in the amphitheatre (napping, reading...) or hiking up the canyon (which could entail a twenty-minute easy walk... after which was a big scrambling area followed by a Kanab-like stretch - with no real epiphany). I did a little of both - napping, reading, eating my lunch, and the easy walk. In the middle of our time there, though, this LOUD and slightly offensive bunch of privates showed up (i.e. having little races down the main stream with makeshift "raft-twigs," cussing incredibly loudly whenever their craft flipped or got stuck).



Left to Right: (top) in Matkat amphitheatre - flowers, napping; (bottom) leaving Matkat, abstract reflection shots

At two, we headed back to the boats - this time taking the high route. Although Kim felt certain I was NOT going to like this path (because it was edgy and exposed), it didn't bother me hardly at all - mostly because we were only about twenty feet above the narrows... already within the enclosed space of the side canyon walls (i.e. it wasn't openly soaring). En route to our camp at the infamous "ledges" camp (i.e. where Jenn, during my last trip, decided to tequila-body-shot our leader's fine abs), we rafted Upset (class 8), a rapid that seemed much bigger last time. I can't say for certain whether we were at the same ledges camp as before... because there are at least a couple nearby sites called "ledges" (one occupied by the aforementioned private party, likely engaged in levels of debauchery that exceeded Jenn's previous antics). Although there wasn't any particularly scandalous behavior at our camp that night, it was Mary's birthday and Martha did cook up her famous enchiladas (featured at her restaurant in Alaska). I thought they were tasty but Martha's level of heat-tolerance was much higher than mine. Unfortunately, I also picked a terrible campsite; given my knee injury (in conjunction with my tendency to roll everywhere at night), I decided to use one of the very limited spots in the sand (vs. on the hard-rock ledges). Although I knew my site had a slope to it, I didn't realize how bad it was until around midnight; consequently, I spent most of the night slowly slipping down toward the lower right side of the tent, and then having to get up and move back up. Between my upset stomach and the sliding, it was my worst night of sleep on the whole trip. Other moments of drama that night - which no-doubt frustrated my mind - included the following: First, Jerry decided to survey the passengers about their priorities for "big hikes" during our few remaining days. His real question, though, was how important Havasu was. Havasu, after all, had suffered a MAJOR flooding event this August - specifically, an earthen dam(n) at the upstream reservation village of Supai failed during a massive rainstorm. As a result, ALL tourist access to Havasu from the rim has been shut down until next year, owing to serious sanitation and infrastructure repairs that have to be made. Also, Havasu Creek's usual Little Colorado-like blue color has not been seen since - replaced by brownish water... a combination of soil, minerals, and human waste. No - I'm not making this up; even my previous hike up Havasu with OARS took place after a mild rainstorm... the water looked and smelled like feces to the point that the guides made us bathe after slogging waist/waste-deep. After moderate deliberation, our group decided to forego Havasu - the deal being that it would allow us to explore less-visited areas downstream. Although I can't say I wholeheartedly supported this decision, I did grow excited when Jerry said we would be taking a short hike up National Canyon (which, like Matkat, I'd heard was really good and hoped to finally visit) during lunch tomorrow... to break up what was going to be a long day on the river (close to 29 miles!). The second moment of drama came when "we" (just the passengers)

decided to stake paddle-boat claims because we were now definitely going to run Lava tomorrow. Although I expressed initial interest, I was disappointed because - not surprisingly - WAY more people than there were seats wanted on the paddle-boat. Consequently, a couple really awesome guys from my favorite paddling days bowed out... meanwhile, aforementioned folks I didn't fully trust wanted in. Given that Lava, in my opinion, is the biggest and most dangerous rapid on the river, I also bowed out. That I eventually lost an entire night of sleep simply cinched the deal. On a brighter note, though, I secured a spot with Martha over dinner - knowing that if I wasn't going to paddle Lava, going through with Martha was an equally worthy experience. In retrospect, I'd say it was worth more - because the chances of me padding Lava in the future remain high... but, given Martha's semi-retired status, doing it with her again is probably less likely.



Left to Right: ledges camp; Martha's raft - a LONG day of flatwater before Lava... Martha at her best!

### October 9, 2008 - River Day Thirteen (Definitely), Ledges to Lower Lava/Fat City Camp (mile 180-ish)

Exhausted, I set out with Martha and two other passengers: Kyle, one of my favorite paddlers (who first bowed out of Lava), and DJ, a lower-canyon-only newbie with no previous rafting experience. Unfortunately, I can't tell you a lot about today's many hours on the boat. I remember talking with Martha a lot about her trips down the Alsek and Firth... reminding myself that the main reason I like rafting is not big whitewater... it is about accessing remote wilderness. Indeed, my experience on the Futaleufu made me never want to become one of those people who HAD to plow through the biggest whitewater because that was the end-all of a trip; in many ways, not running Lava ultimately represented my own self-check to that effect. I can also tell you that when we passed Havasu, the emerging creek water was brown (which diminished some of my ongoing funk about choosing to forego this hike). Finally, I - and a few others - were frustrated and upset when Jerry bypassed National Canyon for this odd, messy side-canyon called Fern Glen as the promised lunch stop hike. Although many of us grudgingly began to follow him up said canyon, we were quickly greeted by a stagnant pool that seemed to be well over waist-deep based on Mary getting in (either that, or a crazy scramble that they eventually brought ropes for). Consequently, about half a dozen of us (including me) retreated to the beach... FREEZING from what had been a terrifically cool morning on the water.



Left to Right: Lava Falls scout, the slightly anxious team, back to the river to face the V-wave, view of rapid

After lunch, we thankfully started hitting more regular sun... but I'm not going to lie: it was a LONG, LONG, LONG day on the water. Given that OARS chose to hike Havasu (i.e. breaking this day up), we definitely didn't raft such a comparably long day on my previous trip. Making matters worse, HUGE upriver winds began to REALLY roar about two. I think it was around then that I started waking up - truly appreciating my decision to ride as a passenger... the looks and comments from the paddlers communicating exhaustion and doubt (including one person asking me to trade out). Doubtful sentiments seemed to peak when we arrived at the Lava scout, although Martha - with her usual verve - assured them they would rise to the occasion when that first gigantic wave hit them. Of course, she also seriously said that one's fate in Lava - after hitting the V-wave - was completely in the hands of god (i.e. there were several major trajectories you could wind up on at that point, none of which were in your control). Looking down at Lava, I freely admit, was scary because it looked much bigger than before (again - there were 4,000 cfs MORE water churning down that baby today). Lava, after all, was the only rapid that utterly silenced me on my previous trip; I recalled it being scary, violent, and really long. Getting back on the boat, Martha batted down the hatches and gave us a few pointers. I recall firmly saying to DJ (next to me): this is a really violent rapid, hold on with all your might and keep low when the waves are coming at you. Last time, Jenn and I - in my opinion - were less careful about these two points; Jenn, in particular, was fully thrown out of her seat and seemed concerned she could have been washed out of the raft. Martha's boat went down third. Holding on and keeping low, my view was more limited... although I thought the V-wave was much taller and bigger than before. In fact, Martha's description was that we actually "submerged" the V-wave... which I don't doubt. Having had too many big rapids get serious water in my ears, I had finally put on my showercap-like NRS special... even with it on, though, I felt completely underwater for a couple seconds - my nose flush with water, my sinuses emerging surprisingly refreshed. While I don't remember the middle section well, I do remember seeing the giant rock on river right REALLY close to the raft as the waves waned. Narrowly avoiding said rock, we turned towards river left, fully stopping in a small eddy to make sure the paddle-boat (behind us) ran intact - which they did. Although Lava felt shorter than before

(lasting twenty seconds, the total average run length), it was definitely bigger and more violent. Martha said today's Lava definitely lived up to its reputation - and it was her favorite run on the whole trip (not to mention, in recent memory). Indeed, Martha was extremely animated while running Lava - to the point that Kyle (seated in the rear of the boat) did this hilarious impression of her beating on those oars while being fully pummeled from all directions by the crazy waves. From my perspective, Martha could be heard joyfully yelling many long expletives in the waves... and all the way into camp, describing the waves; pulling onto the shore, Martha cracked open beers from her private stash as the three of us disembarked. Again, that's why I love Martha and wanted to say I went down Lava Falls with her at the helm. As for the paddle-boat report, Somer - for the first and only time on this trip - warned that she would be calling a "hold on/duck" command as they hit the V-wave (as per our similar instructions during the first hit in Bidwell); they then had to quickly emerge to paddle like hell. Somer said it was her best run of Lava ever, staying within the best/safest line possible. We camped immediately below Lava Falls, on this long beach from which you could still see the rapid (albeit very small-looking). With only an hour of daylight left, camps were set up promptly and the bathing/relaxing time was short. Dinner, this really taste "Thai turkey" dish along with Dutch oven pineapple upside-cake, was enjoyed in the dark. Knocking myself out with some Nyquil, I enjoyed a long sleep - albeit not that natural-feeling come morning.



Left to Right: lava/columnar basalt, paddle-boat drafting Kim, 194-mile canyon's spotted sidewalk

#### October 10, 2008 - River Day Fourteen, Fat City to Parachant Wash and Camp (mile 198)

As with my last trip down the Colorado, I awoke the day after running Lava with my period. Where, last time, it was almost two weeks early and I wasn't prepared, this time it was a couple days early and I had precisely the amount of gear to get me home. I had, in fact, been feeling a little pissily anxious the last few days... and now I knew why: PMS. As such, I went down the river as Jed's passenger... because he was the last guide I hadn't ridden with - and I promised him yesterday that he was next. Jed will forever, in my opinion, be known as "the man in the big yellow hat" (or whatever Curious George dude is called) - because that's how Jo described him during the Nankoweap-Kwagunt traverse. While the size and shape of Jed's distinctive hat is definitely like that in Curious George, I would call it ivory, not yellow. Anyway, Jed has worked for AZRA for many years (seven, I believe) - although it sounded like he was often in charge of motorized trips (which, I daresay, sound less offensive to me - partly because AZRA does run a few decent-sized ones and partly because I can appreciate why some people might not want to camp in the sand for sixteen days). Anyway, Jed, in his early thirties, was from Flagstaff. Although Jed was on the quieter side, he was easy to converse with and readily shared personal information in a reflective and very self-aware manner (e.g. his great love for his young son, a recent divorce). Although I never witnessed a crazy wild side to Jed while on the river, I suspect he's got some interesting facets... don't know why I say that - he just gave me that vibe. Anyway, Jerry's goal for the day was to make it down to Spring Canyon (between miles 204-5) - where he hoped to do a more significant morning hike tomorrow. If you compare this goal with the title, though, you will note that we didn't make it that far. Indeed, the wind REALLY came early and hard... completely setting off today's goals and affecting the remainder of the trip.

Perhaps suspecting this (but equally hoping the winds might die down if we waited...), Jerry called an early lunch and hike at 194-mile canyon. Although I didn't have high expectations about this hike, I was pleasantly surprised. As with Bedrock, this was a two-hour non-epiphany trip. 194-mile canyon initially did not look like it was going to be that interesting - but then the walls grew high, the walkway narrow. Although there wasn't an endpoint goal, the crux for some of us (albeit in different ways) came after about ten minutes in the canyon proper: this dramatic pinching off of the lower canyon level, the point where the craziest (more funny than dangerous) climbing move on the whole trip was required. For many reasons (including laughing so hard I forgot, and not wanting to embarrass anyone), I took no specific pictures. Jerry, of course, was the first one up - moving so fast that the rest of us didn't appreciate what we were about to have to do to proceed. However, Kim (who, it should be repeated, seemed to have zero body fat) made the point to all of us. The crucial move was basically to climb face-forward up the pinching-off lower canyon level - ultimately reaching up and grabbing this head-sized chockstone lodged just at the upper level (for most people, this reach was at or just over the head). Grasping slightly upwards, your hands were holding a solid crack behind the chockstone but the space in front of your body was this holey crevice. The essence of the next step was to muscle your torso over the chockstone and then wiggle in this waist-wide space (nothing being off limits) to the point that the rest of you went over to the upper canyon level. Well, Kim (like everyone else) got into the torso-on-chockstone position and struggled for a perceptible amount of time. From our perspective below (maybe twelve feet below and back), all we saw were Kim's flailing legs and ass jiggling as she tried to do something not even Jerry could describe in any technical terms (aside from laughing about how we obviously needed to let go of all our shame). One of the other women next to me audibly noted that if Kim's tiny ass looked that mobile, she couldn't imagine how the rest of our major asses were going to appear when it was our turn. Believe it or not, three people actively turned around at this point. I, on the other hand, was all about the crazy ass move... even though I was concerned there was a good chance I'd shoot my tampon while flopping or flailing. By the time it was my turn, Jed (helping from below) had started providing cupped hands to everyone so the flop move wasn't as hard. In contrast with most others (although everyone was fairly different in their chosen wiggle move), I found it easiest to turn on my side and then shoulder my way up (particularly given my knee wound). Meanwhile, Kim, who'd loaned me a tampon at lunch

(because my flow was bigger than I'd planned for), was coaching from the top - and so I (of course) commented that I hoped she had another one on her because I might shoot what she'd just given me. Jed apparently heard these words and was said to have backed way down. Oh well. Kim thought that was hilarious. Little did she know, I'd actually shot a tampon on a very remote section of the John Muir Trail.



Left to Right: 194-mile canyon - ocatillo, mouth, first narrows, above the belly-flop chockstone, beautiful upper sections

After the crux, the way continued to be very interesting and beautiful: lots of great sidewalk-like ledges and natural staircases, gloriously curvaceous rocks with small pools, and - of course - a few more minor scrambling places where the guides provided a hand (but nothing as shameless and ass-jiggling as the crux). After an hour, Jerry called stop and we enjoyed a shady spot for a ten-minute break... the red-to-purple hues of the rocks especially vivid. And then we continued down. Although Jerry insisted going down the crux was MUCH easier, I thought it was pretty hard because you basically had to do the whole thing in reverse. Back at the boats, the wind seemed to be the same if not worse. But there was nothing to do except plug on. Given that the paddle-boat seemed particularly challenged, many things (e.g. tying onto Kim's boat to allow them to draft) were attempted. But, in the end, we only made it to mile 198, which featured a large and pleasant camp adjacent to a pretty side canyon called Parachant Wash. At the time, I assumed we'd be hiking that tomorrow. Although I picked a nice campsite shielded within a cluster of tamarisk, most people - and most of the camp - seemed to be pummeled by tremendous winds and hellish levels of blowing sand. Even the camp kitchen (which had been fully set up right along the beach) was eventually moved to ten feet from my tent to escape being blown away. Tonight's dinner was another memorable creation of Martha: vegetarian posole (which means hominy but can also mean stew with hominy... and this certainly was), and crispy cheese quesadillas. Given that a lot of people who had brought their own alcohol were now giving away major leftovers, I enjoyed some more beer - which is always pleasant on a hot river trip. For the record, I chose not buy my own booze or drink anything prior to yesterday's post-Lava treat from Martha because alcohol tends to mess up my respiratory system - to the point I often get sinus problems and/or a funky cough. Given that it was the end of the trip, I figured it was time to take a chance. At some point, I took my last photograph (featuring the camp and Parachant); not only did it suck, but the lens first refused to retract. After playing with the camera awhile, I shut it off - but then it wouldn't turn on again. Oh well.



Left to Right: all courtesy of Jackie and Jim - the man in the big ivory hat (on the Tabernacle), take-out, our poo

### October 11-13, 2008 - River Days Fifteen and Sixteen... to Diamond Creek, Flagstaff, and Oregon

In contrast with my assumption that we'd be hiking Parachant come morning, Jerry seemed rather dire in his forecast: the wind was still bad, and we needed to do 22 miles today to make it out on time. While some people were upset (given that we'd given up hiking Havasu), I sort of looked at it with the same mindset we had to take on the John Day trip when similar wind problems came up on that trip: it simply was a different challenge. As with my response to the jiggy-ass crux, too, I decided it was better to just crazily succumb: I became the paddle-boat timer ALL DAY. While the winds were occasionally bad, we had better current overall and - in my opinion - not as consistently strong gusts throughout the day. To my surprise (because, as I've said before: everything on these lower sections seemed new to my eyes), we ran three big mile-named rapids (all rated class 7): miles 205, 209, and 217... plus a few small ones (the best being "Little Bastard"). As with yesterday, Jerry did call a short hike (right after mile 205 rapid) to some Pai/Paiute roasting pit ruins where, in addition to an obvious ash layer, there were arrow points and quides - which are chewed and then spit-out agave fiber remains (i.e. the Pai/Paiute roasted the agave, chewed it to suck out the sugar, and then spit out these distinctive fiber balls - which, like, still remain). After the hike, Jerry also decided it was time for an early lunch, a VERY tasty apple and chicken curry salad sandwich mix. And then it was all about the river - specifically getting to mile 220 camp. The obnoxious private party (i.e. the ones who interrupted us in Matkat) were already looking and sounding quite drunk at the upper 220-mile camp; indeed, we were greeted by some kind of weird tiny-bikini line of jailbait cheerleaders (literally, doing some kind of odd, inebriated routine) as we passed. Taking the lower camp, we were still occasionally in earshot of their loud partying... which did seem to quiet fairly early (of course, that just means they all fell asleep - having started partying long before we arrived). Our last night in camp was VERY, VERY, VERY cold. Most of us spent as much time as possible crowded around the roaring fire. We found out

the next day that it had snowed in Flagstaff... which means we were probably hovering around 36° F. Dinner featured a simple penne pasta with red sauce and cheese, and a big two-layer frosted chocolate cake. We amused ourselves by applying Faye's glow-in-the-dark Halloween tattoo stickers; I got away with NOT doing my face because I was the one who troubleshot the first application (to the top of my hand), and then got everyone else going. Although there was a fair bit of sentimental hyperbole expressed by many people (guides and clients alike) about the trip and tomorrow's transition back to the real world, I was probably more stoic that night... not to mention ready to return to my home, my bed, the sight of lush green forests and fields. Not that I didn't love this group, not that I didn't love seeing unworldly dimensions of rocks and sand everywhere (above me, below me, in my clothes...), and not that I didn't love the buoyant feel and look of the Colorado - which never turned red on this trip... don't know what that means, but it did inspire the title revision: like water for water, not chocolate (as on the last trip).

After a rough night fighting cold and sand, I was surprised to hear that Jerry wasn't calling some short, wild pre-breakfast scramble... there were, after all, plenty of small rugged buttes within walking distance. But, no, everything today was about getting to Diamond Creek promptly (i.e. before the neighboring privates started losing their hangovers). After moderate consideration, I decided to spend my last five miles on Jed's boat (Kim having been an equal choice). Can't explain why it came down to them... although, in contrast with my last trip here, I never got emotional or felt sadness today or after this trip; perhaps that is why Jed and Kim were appealing - because they were both thoughtfully calm people. Talking with Jed, I said something I've said in other reports: that I fully accept these trips are like flings... sure, we'll all write a few emails, and there's always a chance a couple of us will meet up again. But you can't expect anything serious or long-term once we all return to our regular lives. Indeed, in all my years of doing these kinds of trips, I've remained close to only one person longer than a few months (Ginnie, from the Arctic Hulahula); but even we have yet to travel together again (despite seriously discussing a couple rivers). Anyway - we arrived at Diamond Creek a little after ten. Given that there were several Hualapai people fishing or picnicking along the shore, Jerry made sure we did our best to respect the local customs: e.g. not publicly, visibly peeing in the river or undressing to anything like underwear. Although Diamond Creek looked familiar, I wished my camera was working the whole time during tear-down... because AZRA was so organized, orderly, and meticulous. Plus, they had this awesome gear truck with, like, a fully mechanized lift off the back. We even physically washed the boats (using gunny sacks as sponges and forcibly sloshing buckets of water into all the nooks and crannies), which meant some of us (like me) getting very wet (fine because it had warmed up). After posting the first version of this report, I was able to add a few choice take-down shots courtesy of Jackie and Jim - all placed at the beginning of this section. I can still recall how excited Jackie was to photograph our poo boxes being mechanically hoisted onto the truck... this from a woman who said she barely passed microbiology when she was in nursing school (which I find hard to believe as all good microbiologists LOVE documenting poo).

Anyway - our previous bus driver eventually showed up bearing a gorgeous lunch spread, including the top food items on most peoples' minds: Lay's potato chips and ice-cold Coke products. We hit the road around twelve thirty. The drive to the rim up from Diamond Creek was one of the worst roads I have ever experienced... and I have experienced a lot of shitty roads. I don't know what the mileage to the rim was but it took an hour of - particularly at the beginning - VERY slow driving over deep creek-cut ruts. For most of the way, glorious ocatillo - some with flaming red, crocosmia-like blooms - decorated the otherwise stark landscape. After joining up with Route 66, our only stop while returning to Flagstaff was at this odd little fixture in Seligman; the apparently popular/usual ice cream cones were replaced today with hot coffee or cocoa because, once we hit the top, an icy wind seemed to cut through all the sun's warmth. We arrived back in Flagstaff at four, with plans to meet for a final group dinner at seven. Completely occupied by cleaning (three levels of bathing plus laundering several bloodied sets of underwear and pants), plus sorting gear and hanging damp clothes up to dry, those three hours passed quickly. Carpooling downtown, we walked three blocks in what had to have been freezing conditions. Dinner was fine - both in terms of food and camaraderie. As usual, I think everyone was just exhausted - the guides more than the clients, of course. The meal seemed to break up chaotically - to the point that I never really said goodbye to some people. The next morning, Mary and I - as planned - met for breakfast and then found a really nice and efficient cabbie to take us various places of interest. First, we visited the fine Museum of Northern Arizona (a five-mile trip from our hotel); here, I put away a moderately large sum of money on a Hopi kachina doll carving (specifically, a badger) and several books about the Hopi, which most fascinated me in terms of newfound knowledge while on the river (care of Harlan). We then headed back into downtown Flagstaff for a big caffeine and sugar reload at this swanky coffee-shop-by-day-bar-by-night. Finally, we did a little more walking and shopping before heading to the airport (after picking up our luggage at the hotel). Although we shared the same flight back to Phoenix, I can assure you that Mary and I definitely had 100% different experiences in the air; namely, I got stuck in the back with this older couple - the wife barfing THREE times during the final ten minutes of the incredible (class 5/10) turbulence. Even though I could, at one point, actually smell the salsa-oriented breakfast material she'd just thrown up, I managed to NOT puke. Thankfully, my flight back to Portland was pleasant and uneventful.

### **Closing Thoughts - Not Quite Circling the Drain**

After returning home, some things have felt totally normal but others have been completely whacked. For starters, it took me two weeks to return to my usual sleeping pattern - and simply catch up on a LOT of lost sleep during this trip. Although most of my flesh wounds have healed, my fingertips have not returned to normal; they feel like they did when I spent several months trying to learn to play the guitar - all the tips calloused and/or worn down to the point they have lost some superficial sensation. I can only assume that sand, water, and paddling 120 miles is somehow to blame. The rest of me, though, feels much stronger and more fit. Even Allison, who picked me up en route home, said I looked thinner: "like all that paddling reduced your love handles." While I agree things have redistributed, the scale begs to differ with her assertion that I LOST weight. Now being also older and more experienced, I can say - with more conviction than I had ten years ago - that rafting down the Colorado/Grand Canyon is one of the greatest trips on earth, something I maintain everyone should do in his/her lifetime. While I loved this version - howsoever challenging - I can appreciate that there are MANY people who couldn't handle THIS trip. And even though one can find shorter non-hiking trips with no paddling, there is no getting around the camping, the tents, the sand, and the being wet - all of which build great character. Indeed, for me, this trip has had a similar effect as the

Alsek: reminding me I can still do fiercely hard things. Plus, I got back some of my river mojo, which had been diminishing since my dad passed away. AZRA, like I said, gets a lot of kudos for being as hard-core as they promised in terms of serious hiking/scrambling and paddling. Plus, they - or the nature of this trip - completely attracted the right clientele. AZRA's service - be it in terms of camp features like the kitchen and groover, all the food, transportation to/from the river, and guiding - was excellent... EASILY en par with OARS. While I will never forget my first trip (for many reasons), I am fairly certain I will go back to AZRA for my next trip down the Colorado. And, yes, the opportunity to paddle that whole river - despite my occasional love/hate relationship with the paddle-boat and all its drama - remains an irresistible draw... both the mind-blowing hydraulics of the whitewater and the peacefully meditative flatwater I never would have predicted would be so fulfilling.



Left to Right: me in Kanab (courtesy of Jackie and Jim)... the price you pay for such beauty - think about that.