

Like Chocolate for Water

400 Miles Rafting the Colorado - Utah's Canyonlands and Arizona's Grand Canyon



Left to Right: Somewhere - Grand Canyon, big wave in Gem Series/Grand Canyon, Allison rowing Colorado/Canyonlands

Everyone should experience one solid week of rafting the Colorado. It IS an incomparably life-altering experience. To date, I have accrued 400 miles of rafting on the great river - albeit broken up by the damnable Lake Powell - via two legendary trips: the 2000 trip down Grand Canyon (with Jenn and company) and 2002 trip down Canyonlands (with Allison).

Prelude - Colorado/Grand Canyon

We, 16 passengers, arrived at Lees Ferry, below the Glen Canyon Dam(n) - in stupefied states: stupefied by the depths of oranges and red towering above (which we descended with a swiftness that defined the prior hours of speeding over parched flatlands), the silvery laze of the blue-green river (that we knew would change her character many times in the course of the next two weeks), and the blazing heat that seemed to be an active, living force (active in the sense that it wanted to suck us dry, wear us down), and stupefied by the expectations of what lay ahead (based both on years of planning and on the casually, grandly terrifying words of our hunky trip leader the night before in the comfort of the hotel lobby). And then this strange man who was employed by OARS approached me. He bore a weird gait, a face that was askew when he spoke, prominently bad teeth (one missing and two so crooked that he seemed to spit through the uneven spaces between them as he lisply spoke) protruding from his mouth, eyes that crossed and wandered all at once, and a dirty ivory leather cowboy hat wrinkled and chewed along the edges: "Hi there beautiful - I'm Matt. What's yer name?" And he extended his hand. I was told that I recoiled physically. My immediate mental response: "Good god - was this the result of a rafting accident? Lava Falls? Crystal? What the hell have I gotten myself into?" Matt made the rounds after I finally managed to answer him and shake his hand. Ten minutes later, Matt pulled out the fake teeth, straightened up (mostly), uncrossed his eyes, tousled the pony tail from under his still chewed hat, and impishly laughed: GOTCHA!!! It was a given that we would ride with Matt first. It was also clear that this trip was going to be about personalities as much as it was about the land, the river, and the heat.

Our sub-party included Jenn, Steve (Jenn's now former fiancé), Mikkel (a personal friend of Jenn and Steve), and I. Jenn and I booked the trip in 1998 through OARS, one of 16 companies who have commercial permits to guide the Grand Canyon. We all had different motivations - although Jenn and I were the nucleating forces. In my case, I was asked to go down the Grand Canyon on a private trip in 1996 by Cara and Dennis, friends/colleagues who defined my interest in rafting. Cara and Dennis, having rafted many difficult North American rivers, had waited 9 years for their permits (currently, the waitlist for privates is 14 years). Given this tantalizing offer, I felt myself swept into everything I could gobble up about the Grand Canyon. Sadly, family choices forced Cara and Dennis to abandon their trip. As I began to settle in Oregon amidst a new social circle that included several rafters - I began my hobby as a raft passenger (see Oregon Rafting Collection), rowing simple water, assuming leadership roles and kitchen duties. But I accepted that I was not going to dive into this form of recreation for real. And that's when I began pawing through company catalogs and making lists of dream trips - the Colorado/Grand Canyon holding the top spot. In 1998, I told Jenn I planned to book the Grand Canyon/Colorado and she expressed immediate interest. Jenn lost her still-young father to cancer in 1997. Her fondest memories of him included growing up in southern California amidst ocatillo and Joshua trees, and visiting the Grand Canyon. During the 1980s, her father rafted the Colorado, breaking his nose when the boat folded and gear smashed into his face. Despite said mishap, Jenn had longed to travel the great waterway in memory of her father. Perhaps it was fate that the trip we wound up booking overlapped with the third anniversary of her father's passing. Jenn also booked Steve - who became her fiancé in February 2000 - hoping to inspire him in the ways of desert beauty. For the months prior to this trip, we threatened to marry them off in Vegas en route. Jenn also booked Mikkel, a friend from Denmark who partook in international adventures and had adequate vacation time to accommodate this trip.

We would put in at Lees Ferry on Aug. 13, and take out at Pearce Ferry (nearly 300 miles later) on Aug. 25th - the day before my 33rd birthday. My summer schedule prior to the trip grew harrier and harrier as the trip approached: just prior to this trip, I went to Yellowstone and the Wind Rivers (the latter for the first time). I also unexpectedly landed my first huge NSF grant a month prior, leaving an endless string of paperwork fires to deal with right up to departing for Arizona. Fortunately, preparation for this guided trip was straightforward. Despite at least one huge fight during our 3-day drive (exacerbated by the 108°F temperatures in Needles - and that was at 11 p.m.), we made it to Flagstaff at 2 p.m. on Aug. 12th. We bummed around the town until the mandatory planning meeting at 7 that night. It was then that we met our traveling companions for the first time. We were under the impression that few people booked "whole canyon" trips and so we expected to be one of maybe 8 who would float the whole thing (the others changing at Phantom Ranch). To our surprise, 14 of 16 passengers ALL did the whole trip. In addition to the passengers, 4 guides/oarsmen and 2 swampers manned 5 rafts. The OARS philosophy - as indicated by the name - is to provide oar-driven crafts. I do not support motorized craft in the Grand Canyon. To me, rafting is about traditional rafting skill and small party ethics - NOT gigantic motorized tank crafts with 20 people seated side by side on pontoons. In accordance, 4 rafts served passengers/guides and some gear, and 1 raft carried swampers and the major gear (e.g. grill, stoves, propane, etc.). In contrast with other trips I have done with OARS, there were no "paddle boats" - although

one inflatable two-seater ducky was occasionally available between huge water. The passenger list included a couple from Portland (ballet instructor and landscaper), a father and son team (Warren was a Ph.D. candidate in astronomy from Harvard and Warren's father was a printer in California), a lawyer/freelance author (Roy), and a family with 3 boys, ages 12-17 (Gregory, Michael, and Brian). Dad was an orthopedic surgeon and delightful mom (Barbara) had been in a major accident 20 years prior, leaving her partly unable to walk. Two "upper canyon only" runners, Herb and Nola, were exchanged with a mother and daughter team (music teachers from Washington and Montana). Jenn (patent attorney), Steve (counselor), Mikkel (engineer/sharp shooter), and I rounded out the eclectic team. Although OARS Colorado rules stipulate that children under 12 can not go on the river (because of maturity issues), guides said that some parents had been known to lie about the ages of their children. Having put up with a few immature kids on the 1999 Salmon/Middle Fork (which has no rules about age), I was looking forward to a mature bunch on this trip. This expectation was mostly fulfilled - although I would not have traded this group for the world - especially after the hour-long, no-holds-bar (well... Jenn held a few things) water-fight on day 11 that doused our team more than any single large rapid on the entire trip.



Left to Right: our fabulous guides/oarsmen, swampers Sven and Robert (with their 50-year age gap), the whole team

The OARS team included: Leader Rick H. turned 35 en route and was a hunk who had clearly chosen to shave his head when the hairline started changing. Rick H. held a degree in outdoor recreation and this was his first trip of the season, owing to a shoulder injury. Rick H. was married and worked ski patrol in Tahoe during the off-season. Rick H. was popular with the women for his prominent abs. Fortunately, only ONE of us decided to salt and lick them down during Tequila night. Free spirit Matt, barely 32, received ribbing for looking older and acting younger than his age. When he wasn't regaling us with his younger punk days (screaming for bands "Wheel of Foreskin" and "Jehovah's Wetness"), he was defending his tiny ass and deliberate choice not to be a hard-body (in between pulling up his slipping shorts). We are not sure what Matt did in the off season - although traveling, kayaking, and living out of his van seemed high on the list. Rick D. was the seeming opposite of Matt. At 42, Rick D. was a teacher in Colorado during the off-season. Rick D. left a defense department career in computer programming to travel (prior to this position, he rowed the Zambezi). He was well-educated and well-spoken in science; our party worked hard to loosen him up, given his tendency to go into geology-speak-mode. Like Rick H., Rick D. was hard-body DDG in a mature, lanky, and swarthy way. As such, he was popular with the women - more so because he was unwed, could cook, and had the tidiest boat. Nancy, a fit and gorgeous 40-year old, was not a regular Grand Canyon runner (her stomping grounds were Moab) and thus seemed more reserved. Finishing the crew were Sven and Robert. Sven, a stunningly fit and gorgeous 66-year old with a deep Swedish accent (heard barooming: "HOT COFFEE" and "LAST CALL ON THE UNIT" daily), was a massage therapist during the off-season. Sven celebrated his birthday every year by hiking from the South Rim to the North and back (40 miles/12,000 feet). This regimen explained his amazing legs, which I complimented him on (and made him blush). Robert, an adorably cute 16-year old, was the son of professional oarsmen, explaining how he could be manning the oars through Colorado's largest whitewater. Sven and Robert effectively shared all duties on the gear boat. On the last day, I asked them to pose for a picture: Sven perked up, "SON..." as Robert came running to his side... "DAD." Jenn and I look forward to the day when we return to the Grand and have Robert as our leader.

In terms of packing issues and gear, this was obviously a paid-for, expensive, but active vacation. Consequently, the gear-list was, in some ways, minimal. Nevertheless, even I scratched my head when I realized that this trip was actually going to represent the most nights I've ever slept outside - EVER. Combine this notion with the idea that we were likely to encounter icy muddy water, 105°F plus temperatures, biblical rain, sand everywhere (and most likely blowing), oily sunscreen and other comparable substances (the origin of which you hopefully know), and any number of unpredictable conditions. In these senses, the gear-list was daunting. The important thing to keep in mind: OARS was carrying and cooking all the food. Of course, if you are picky and get sugar-low like me, bring some snacks. Guides are no longer officially allowed to serve alcohol but passengers can purchase their own (provided it is stored in metal or plastic containers) and give it to the guides at put-in. Our party purchased several cases of beer, two boxes of wine, and Gameldansk - an Danish hard liquor whose closest relative, in my opinion, is Jagermeister. Mikkel said the Danes drink a shot each morning on trips to ward off illness. Limited data from this trip suggests it works (but damn does that shit burn going down after breakfast). OARS provided us with an extensive gear list that was, frankly, too big given the weather we enjoyed (or endured). I will simply go down the list and comment accordingly: In terms of footwear, I brought only my brand new Chaco's and, when hiking, wore them with wool socks for foot protection. This was a deliberate choice because my feet were meaty little blister collections after my trip in Winds and you couldn't have paid me to wear real shoes. Bringing only sandals was against recommendations (OARS wanted tennis shoes or hiking boots plus sandals). But it was fine for me because I am very used to hiking in sandals (and one does need to be VERY comfortable hiking in sandals to hike the routes in the Grand Canyon). Clothing was more difficult, even though - in the end - I wore precisely 4 articles of clothing 99% of the time: a pair of shorts, a two-piece swimsuit, a long-sleeve quick drying shirt, and a sarong. In my opinion, everything else (i.e. the fleece and raingear) was unnecessary. Even when it poured in biblical proportions, raingear would have been overkill because storms lasted, at best, 30 minutes. Some folks wore raingear through the rapids - which I thought was funny. It was, on average, 95°F out there... yes, your teeth

chattered after getting hit with the 45-60°F water... but then you just stood up and dried out. A sarong (not on OARS' list) is the most useful item: you can drape it over anything for protection from the sun, you can wet and cool down with it, and you can use it as a sheet for sleeping. My sarong was a gift from Cara, the person who inspired me to do this trip.

While OARS will rent you a tent and sleep kit, I brought my own. I freely admit, however, that ALL MY GEAR was TOTALLY trashed after this trip. I seldom used my bag in a closed state given that it remained near 80°F most nights. Purchasing a cheap liner with a sheet or sarong would probably suffice during hot summer months - although a cold spell could mean disaster. The Thermarest was great, as always, although it was awkward to fit into the standard issue dry-bags provided by OARS. I brought my personal Meteorlight tent - that, in contrast with rental tents - was way more well-ventilated. It should also be noted that many people slept out on the sand under the stars. This is fine if you tolerate blowing sand, the possibility of scorpions, snakes, frogs, or insects entering your personal space. I knew I was not one of these people. I also carried a pharmacy that included tons of antiseptics and bandages for my post-Wind River toes, painkillers, prescription drugs (antibiotics and anti-diarrhea drugs), vitamins, and sun protection (the latter on my person at all times - I never fully burned, for the record). I also carried a much-envied red washcloth and handkerchief for nightly bathing. The things I didn't bring but should have: soap, shampoo, and menstrual supplies. I did not bring the former because I was opposed to putting detergents into the river (which is the practice - and which I eventually did because I grew SOOOO gross). I did not bring the latter because I ended my last period 5 days before this trip... little did I know that someone or something was going to set me off WAY early (see lower section for more details - I dare you). In terms of hydration systems, OARS requested 2 one-liter Nalgene bottles or a 70-100 oz. Camelback. I chose - after persuasion from Jenn - to buy a daypack system that included a 100 oz. Camelback. I also carried a 1 L Nalgene bottle. However, the oarsmen were reluctant to provide easy access to packed Camelbacks (preferring to lash them amidst gear in the back of the boat). Bottles, in contrast, were easily thrown/stored in the bailing buckets in boat passenger areas. During post-white-water bailing (often because the rafts were not self-bailers), cumbersome Camelback/packs got in the way more than the bottles. I filled the Nalgene for boat use and just used the Camelback for the hikes. We had ample opportunity to fill water vessels in the morning and at lunch - so one bottle in the boat was always enough for me. But Camelback-only folks were often frustrated and thirsty. A few miscellaneous things: I shot 10 rolls of 24-36 exposure slide film and definitely wanted more. I used a water resistant Pentax high-end point and shoot. I stored the camera in a synthetic fabric case that was strapped to my life vest. I did store it in my ammo. can (available on board rafts at all times) during serious rapids when I believed I may swim - but the number of times I felt this way was less than the fingers on one hand. I would recommend bringing more stuff for cleaning the camera - a fine paintbrush or air canister. The sand - not the water - is its biggest foe. An EXCELLENT headlamp or flashlight is a MUST. Trudging to the "groover" in the middle of the night for that necessary shit can be long, treacherous, and arduous. Equally dangerous is peeing into the river in the middle of the night - especially for women. Thanks to the Glen Canyon dam(n), the once-sandy shores are intense drop-offs. A couple more steps and you are in the river. Bring the lamp and DO NOT forget extra batteries (for any equipment), especially if you are a night owl. Although I brought a journal and some reading material, I didn't spend more than an hour total reading or writing during the whole trip. All my extra time was spent socializing, bathing, "grooving," or lying in the heat thinking about little other than the scenery or what part of me needed more bathing.



Left to Right: Jenn and the men peeing off the boat, the official groover

Bathroom Essay - Don't Say I Didn't Warn You

One of the most surreal moments on this trip was night 10. It was 2 a.m. and I was stumbling half-naked through the silent camp on my way to the facilities. The facilities include (in order) a hand-washing station in full view. Here, a "ticket" (a square floatation device imprinted with the appropriate phrase NEED HELP) should be left if the other half of the unit (the toilet) is empty (because the latter is a ways back, hidden behind rocks or brush). Anyway, when I arrived, the ticket was gone and so I waited beneath the expanse of stars. Anyway - I about jumped out of my skin when an older male member of our party - clad only in his loose-fitting tighty-whities (jewels clearly delineated there beneath - and ready to make their way out the door) approaches me. The remarkable thing was that I did not even flinch. Why? Because for the 10 days prior, I had been exposed to everything - dangling willies peeing off rafts or from the shore, held in place (or out of place) by classic and determined male poses. I had seen bare asses - both genders bathing nonchalantly from far or near. And I had dropped my shorts and squatted next to passenger-ed boats... hung my ass over raft edges in full or partial view of passing vessels to take necessary leaks. At camp, I waltzed around in a bikini with my hairy armpits and lack of panty-line shaving habits and didn't think twice. I stripped down fully in semi-private coves of rock and bathed completely. Or I washed everything beneath skimpy swimsuits in the middle of camp, popping out boobs here or there and just shaking my head - wondering which of the teenage boys caught that (not that you can actually see them). I don't pretend to be liberal when it comes to nudist tendencies; I got out of taking gym my whole life because I had to wear a brace for scoliosis. Thus, I have always been covert in dressing rooms and the like. Against the backdrop of DDG guides, I would have predicted that I would have hidden my 30-something pooch, my lack of boobs, my breaking out everywhere skin (have I mentioned raft-associated ass-rash?). But I never did. Peeing was easy. Bathing and wearing next to nothing grew exponentially easier as the trip progressed - to the point I think I accepted my aging

body with a vengeful shamelessness. The quiet comfort of others in this regard was refreshing and there was an interesting unspoken humanity (not necessarily humility) in our mutual existence in the realm of the body.

But back to the bathroom: the toilet portion was affectionately known as the groover or unit (a giant metal canister with a toilet seat for shit and toilet paper only). The groover had to be carried with us down the river as no solid fecal matter can be left or buried anywhere in or along the Colorado. There was also a plastic pee bucket, the contents of which were thrown into the river each morning. All urine went into the Colorado - whether emptied from the bucket or placed there directly by the owner. This will sound gross to most people but it is the way urine is handled on most big river trips. Make sure you think about that REALLY hard as you drink water filtered from the river or enter big rapids with your mouth wide open, screaming your brains out. Sufficed to say, bodily functions were a frequent topic of discussion. Obviously peeing was easier for the always-overt guys. Being an observant scientist, I could actually tell you exactly how every guy on the trip removed his personal unit to take a whiz... but I won't. Upon beaching the rafts, there seemed an immediate exodus and posing of guys up and down the beach - accompanied by the sound of water on water. For women, the task was trickier. As learned on the Middle Fork, I took the approach of wearing a bathing suit under my baggy shorts at all times. Peeing simply required that I drop the shorts and pull the crotch of the suit over as I knelt in the water (squatting above the water... not, like, submerged). Getting to the waters' edge, though, meant for often-treacherous situations - particularly at night. Stepping over the edge could land you in deep water very quickly - not to mention in the dark and without a life-vest. While oarsman would gladly stop the boat and pull ashore for pee requests during the day, Jenn and I preferred to pee off the boat (not wanting to be shown up by the guys). The best spot was from the rear passenger portion, off the broad backside of the boat but facing into the boat (i.e. hanging your ass out). Jenn preferred to drop her skivvies and moon other people (especially Warren), freeing both her hands to hold on to the cording strung around the raft. I, on the other hand, held on with one hand and did the crotch move with the other. Both methods involved 20% errors - peeing on the boat or on your feet or hands. Another mandatory discussion is "daytripping." Daytripping was Jenn's forte. Daytripping means taking a shit during the day. Because the groover could not be assembled during the day, a daytripper unit was available for emergencies. Jenn suffered 3 emergencies and I suffered 1, having missed Sven's morning "LAST CALL ON THE UNIT." If you feel movement, you had to ask Sven or Robert for the special ammo. can DAYTRIPPER. Therein you found soap, TP, paper sacks, and a plastic container. To daytrip, you folded down the edges of a lunch sack, and then you aimed your shit into the bag. Soiled TP (and other things) went in the bag as well. After you finished, you folded close the bag and put it in the plastic container (the swamper added it to the main unit later). I think it would have been better to shit on some paper and then, using a baggie like a glove, pick up the shit and invert the bag - putting the whole thing into the paper bag. Having done so on Rainier, I think the glove method was far easier than aiming into a barely upright paper bag that was usually about to get swept away by the frequent afternoon wind.

The final section of this groovy interlude has to do with the word Colorado and what it REALLY meant to me. So - I got my period full-on several weeks early, just after we ran Lava Falls - the biggest rapid on the trip. It was completely unexpected as I had just suffered all through Wyoming with it. On the same day, Jenn (on the pill) also got her period mid-cycle. Consequently, Jenn and I pow-wowed about how this could be happening... But I will leave our always objective (ha ha) speculation for the close of this section. In contrast with the female-dominated Middle Fork crew and groover (which had emergency tampons), there were none in our groover. Thus, I had to approach the guides and beg. A few moments later, I had people putting little bags of women's goodies in my pockets (actually, only Rick H. did that - but he did it with a memorable grin). Being a pad gal who had only used tampons for limited emergencies (and never while on a trip), changing tampons on board a raft every 2-3 hours was hellish (and my extreme periods required it). Jenn patiently provided sarong cover while I crouched on the floor of the boat doing my business: washing down with my appropriately red washcloth (yes, that's why I carry that color), exchanging new and old tampons (note: OB are inserted manually... think about that really hard), bagging the roadkill, and washing again. Being who I am, I made everyone aware of such situations so they'd leave me alone and, remarkably, it was the only time people did not tease me. The first night of the unexpected period, I had such severe cramps that I could not sleep (which was fine because I had to change the bloody things - literally - every 2-3 hours). The second night, I slept so deeply that I didn't wake up to change things like I should have. Major blood all over the sleeping bag. It was one of the most disturbing and nasty nights I have spent outdoors. In between it all, I was completely drained from having bled twice in such a short span of time. Iron deficient since I was 17, I upped my iron dose and finally started feeling normal the third day into this little sub-odyssey. Based on this experience, I strongly recommend bringing whatever it is you use regardless of the time of month or your expectations. Jenn and I were never sure who fucked up our schedules, though. A survey of the women passengers revealed the following data: (1) one woman had long passed into menopause; (2) another was on an estrogen replacement regimen; (3) one woman had just finished her period while on the pill (and never got it on this trip); (4) one woman had also just finished her period but was not on the pill (and she never got it on this trip either); and (5) we weren't sure about the last woman. We also knew that Jenn missed one pill the day before we both started but that has never brought down the house with her like it did on this trip. Given these data, one hypothesis was that there was an alpha female on board - numbers 2 or 5 were strong candidates. Jenn also hypothesized that her not taking one pill could have set me off just a little and then I completely threw her with my immense flow. Another hypothesis was that there was a super-stimulus male who forced one or both of us into early ovulation and so on. Potential males included any/all of the guys from my Yellowstone/Wind Rivers trip; in this scenario, I would have been thrown forward and then I threw Jenn. Males also included any number of men on this trip who could have prompted Jenn and/or I. While we both agree it could be Warren, we think Rick D. is the culprit - although we're not sure that he, working of his own accord, could physically do it. However, his running us through the manliest section of Lava Falls could have elevated his testosterone to super-stimulus levels. Hopefully, he'll never read this - for many reasons (although Jenn and I did smilingly thank him after that run for getting us both completely wet). Alright Jenn - just say it: WOOF.

Miles 1-17: Lees Ferry to Hot Na Na Wash

We put in at Lees Ferry on Aug. 13 around 11 - after a substantial van-ride from Flagstaff that departed the hotel at 7:30 a.m. All personal gear was packed in drybags the night before and we seemed tired and overwhelmed - particularly with the heat.

Sunscreen emerged once the vans dumped their contents on the rocky shore, by which the gentle Colorado ran blue-green. After Matt's aforementioned prelude, water safety presentations were seriously entertained. Life vests were distributed and properly fitted (proper = you can barely inhale a full breath). Somewhat surprisingly, we were never given helmets. The water was running a very low 8000 cfs and there were many exposed boulders during big water sections - although I never felt unsafe. Rick D. gave animated presentations about falling out of the boat under various circumstances, high-siding (throw full weight onto problems to either punch through waves or avoid wrapping the raft around rocks), and the use of the throw-rope. After confirming with Matt (no one else would get into the boat with him after his earlier stunt - although we were all fighting for him by the end), we boarded the rafts and floated down the swift line of current and through several riffles before lunch. I was surprised, based on the calm-looking stillness of the water, that there was any current at all. For the first couple miles (until we passed under Navajo Bridge), there appeared to be a rudimentary trail alongside the river - or at least that was my assumption given the many people fishing at the water's edge. Unfortunately, too, there was a substantial amount of trash not only floating in the river but along the edges. The National Park boundary lies just above Lees Ferry and so we assumed that the trash was the product of crap floating down from the recreation area above or the fact that people could drive to and hike from the ferry. Trash was virtually nonexistent along the interior portion of the river until we arrived at Diamond Creek (12 days later), the next point with road access. Within 15 minutes of put-in, Rick H. threw Gregory (the youngest passenger - who some folks believed was not actually 12) off his boat for being annoying. The expression of horror on that boy's face when he hit the icy water was memorable. Nevertheless, this scenario would be repeated throughout the trip because Gregory would, indeed, continue to be annoying (although it was pretty clear that what he really wanted was attention).



Left to Right: put-in at Lee's Ferry, our vans, another group, our team boats

Remarkably, I (of all people) forgot my flip guide map of the Colorado. I, after all, was the one who called OARS months in advance and asked for my copy - and then left it on the coffee table just as I was rushing out the door. I did record the mileage markers of all camps, though, and used that information to write this report. Within a couple of hours (between mile 5-7), we pulled up to a sandy beach for lunch. Like most beaches, this one was steeply abrupt and awash with dill-like tamarisk that provided modest shade. People were probably more shyly covert about peeing only that first afternoon. Where, later in the trip, few walked far from the rafts to pee, most of us seemed to wander shyly along the shore, gawking back to the boats to see if we were still in view (we always were) before finally just doing our business (backs to the crowd and faces to the river). Out of sight, out of mind. Rick H. gave another talk about safety off the boats while the other guides put out sandwich fixin's. Snakes, scorpions, and red ants were the big things to be aware of. He also discussed hand-washing and water filtering/drinking. We were all famished, incapable of processing any complicated information. I, for one, ate a HUGE sandwich, half an avocado, and 6 Oreos (which Steve gave me shit for consuming). After lunch, we rafted Badger Creek rapid (class 7). As some people know, the Grand uses a 10-point system (1-10), in contrast with the more commonly used I-V system. Shortly thereafter, we rafted Soap Creek rapid (class 5) but I can't say either felt any bigger than anything I'd done before. I was concerned that the low water was going to make for a disappointingly "light" trip down the Colorado. I honestly had been dreaming about 20K cfs and my impression so far was pretty dismal. Mostly, though, I feared I was becoming addicted to larger and larger water and so that meant that I would have to or seek out bigger and more bad-ass rivers (e.g. Selway, Tatshenshini...).



Left to Right: Marble Canyon section, lunch spot/tamarisk, evening light from camp

Our first night's camp was between miles 16-7 at Hot Na Na Wash. This large camp offered a huge universal cooking area that was distant from the campsites (incidentally, guides slept on their boats by the kitchen). The campsites were spread out beyond a large wash that looked like it had recently seen substantial water. Many parties, including Jenn, camped above the river in the tamarisk. I camped by the water's edge - on sand that was flat and damp. Unlike other parties, I had my own tent and set up things during tent presentation. A strong wind picked up as I staked the corners and threw my gear inside. I opted not to use the fly. I went back to the universal area, overly concerned the whole time about where I was putting my feet because I thought there were going to be scorpions and snakes everywhere. Comments about putting large rocks in the

corners of the tents were being made when I arrived, Rick H. claiming he'd seen occupied tents lifted into the air by windstorms if such actions weren't taken. Being paranoid (and/or gullible), I returned to my campsite to place several immense rocks as such. I was paranoid each time I rolled over a rock, convinced that snakes and scorpions would be laying in wait. I then decided to take a sponge bath... and so I stripped down to my bikini and cleaned with river water. While this ritual felt awesome, it seemed the winds were dying down, leaving temperatures warmer than earlier in the day. I slowly made my way back to the universal area, arriving in the middle of the bathroom discussion. Dinner that night was chicken Cordon Bleu with rice and vegetables and dessert (fresh strawberries, pound cake, whipping cream). Rick D. decided to be funny and spray the whipping cream on the strawberries and then keep going up my arm. I licked that off in a no-doubt suggestive manner, explaining any number of later incidents. After dessert, Rick H. announced the schedule for tomorrow: coffee call at 6, a full day on the river with a number of modest rapids. I remember going to bed thinking - how could I be this tired? I haven't done anything all day. AND it was only just after 8 p.m. As I trudged to my tent, it was clear from overheard conversations that some parties were not prepared for this style of camping. I clearly heard the actual phrase: "We are in hell, I tell you - HELL!" Aside from the putative bugs, snakes, and scorpions, though, I felt confident that sleeping outside - even for a record 12 nights straight - wasn't going to do me in. Sleeping proceeded well relative to other nights. Most people in the trees envied those of us near the water because we enjoyed breezes throughout the otherwise stifling night. In the middle of the night, some spitting rain penetrated the mosquito netting moon-roof and I debated about whether to erect the fly. Lying there on the fully opened sleeping bag naked (the only way to endure the heat), I decided the rain felt nice... although cooler temperatures following the brief rain caused me to wrap up first in my sarong and then in the bag (albeit not zipped).



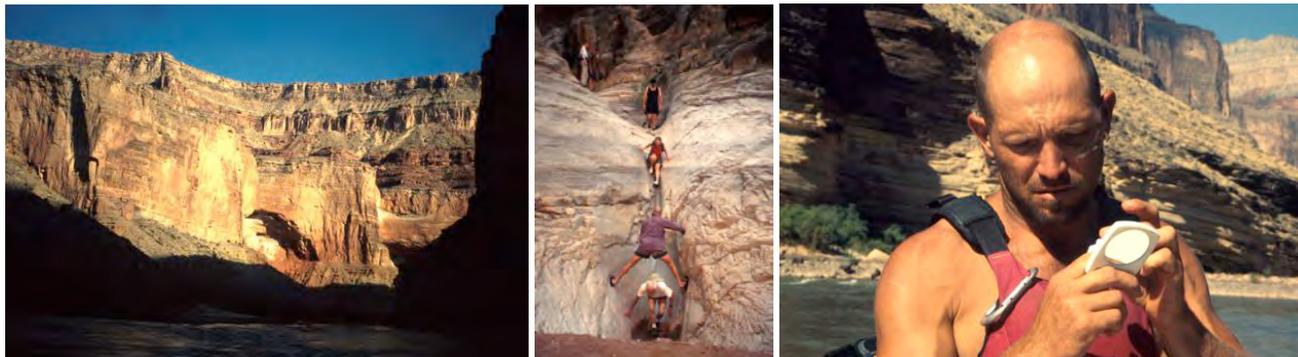
Left to Right: North Canyon, Vasey's Paradise, Redwall Canyon

Miles 18-35: Hot Na Na Wash to Nautiloid Canyon

As usual, I missed the call for coffee, waking around the time breakfast was served. I learned on the Middle Fork that it was best to skip coffee and pack up first. Then I'd show up to breakfast, carrying all my bags, eat - and (most importantly) get to use the unit at a leisurely pace while everyone else was packing. Hopefully everyone will appreciate how annoying it is to try to take a leisurely morning dump knowing there are half a dozen people waiting in line. Humorously, the Rick's were having a similar discussion as they passed out bacon and pancakes - although their precise debate was whether a good shit was as good as sex (there seemed to be no agreement). Having pre-packed, I got to sit and watch a lot of commotion. It was clear, again, that there were a few guests not finding the camping groove - whether in terms of working as a team, understanding how to close the dry bags properly, or realizing that the guides were not there to pack up personal campsites or carry bags. After getting on the water by 8 a.m., we were on the boats most of the day - that day with Rick H. The first big water was House Rock Rapid (class 8). It was clear that Rick H. enjoyed getting all his passengers very wet. Steve and Mikkel, in the back of the boat, were goading him to soak the women (Jenn and I) and so Rick backed into House Rock and completely soaked the guys first, then 180-d the boat mid-rapid to drench the women - laughing sadistically through it all. Rick H's otherwise proper appearance and manners seemed, in our assessment that day, to have an interestingly blasphemous side. After a long stretch of mild water and lunch, we hit the "roaring twenties" (about 8 rapids rated 5 or higher, one after another). Mile 24 rapid became an instant favorite (class 7) and my concerns about the water being too small diminished. Rick H. happily encouraged us to bow-ride different rapids (we're not sure if that is actually legal in the OARS regulations). Near the 29-mile rapid, we stopped at North Canyon for our first hike. I was initially disappointed that Barbara had to sit this (and all) hikes out. But she waited everything out so patiently and contentedly - and she seemed to always have a smile on her face, as though she was picturing the whole thing from having been there before. The brief hike ascended level sand, boulder-strewn sand, and then talus onto different tiers of sandstone. Two slabs were so high that they required some assistance (a cupped hand and lift from your neighbor). Each tier led into a more amazing bowl of reddish purple or tan stone... and each bowl had different levels of water (mostly stagnant at close range) that, from a distance, appeared like mercury. The rounded slot canyon feel was overwhelmingly beautiful. We climbed through perhaps 5 tiers of mirror-bottomed halls before coming to a spherical hall that was deep with water and so steep on all sides that passage higher would require swimming through the final pool. And so we were content to sit quietly and stare in awe at the macroscopic and microscopic details of the fan-like stone.

Downstream, we stopped to admire Vasey's Paradise, a green oasis fed by springs that emerge from the redwall. Here, many plants - maidenhair fern, poison ivy, monkeyflower - crowded around the clear, sun-heated water rushing down the rocks into the chilly Colorado. Within a couple of miles of Vasey's was famous Redwall Cavern - said to be as large as a football field. It looked something like a giant airplane hanger from a distance. Its initially steep banks lead to a broad high field of soft sand and I took my shoes off the first time and ran around barefoot (unconcerned about snakes, scorpions, etc.). One could, indeed, hike far back into the dark, cool recesses of the undercut rock. The guides set up a game of team Frisbee and I remember Rick D. asking whether I was going to play. I said no because my blisters were still ugly and I didn't want to get hurt. Talk about getting hurt - geez. I was sitting to the side on these boulders when I saw Rick H. slide to catch - literally - the first throw. I recall thinking: I wonder if he knows there are boulders right there, including partly under the sand. I next recall hearing Matt

rushing to him, asking if he was alright. After a long pause, Rick H. replied solemnly and certainly: "no." That was when I looked over and saw the blood pouring down Rick H's face, mostly from his ears. I almost fainted. Rick H. hit the boulder with his cheekbone and then slid over and past the rock, sloughing all the way back to his ear. A gaping puncture wound on the cheek was evident - as was the fact that his ear had substantial tears. But I turned away because I was blacking out. In that moment, I couldn't tell if his eye had hit. Notions of an eye injury and/or a skull fracture were all that kept going through my head as I hyperventilated. Rick D. (also an EMT) rushed for first aid materials and, with Dr. Paul coaching, worked to slow the bleeding. Rick H. was conscious - albeit fucked up. He openly stated that he didn't want stitches put in (Paul would have done it) because stitching under these circumstances could leave a scar. I figured, based on this coherent conversation, that Rick H. did not have a concussion. Paul insisted they flush the wounds with clean water before putting on any iodine that would discolor the wounds and confuse interpretation. They eventually butterflyed the wounds - although bleeding would continue to ooze over the next several days. Much discussion went into how to insure that the wounds not become infected. Both Paul and I had prescription antibiotics and were prepared to give them to Rick H. if he developed a fever. Distressingly, this whole time Matt had his video camera going. Rick H., of course, seemed to get a kick out of it later when he was cogent enough to watch it with a pained smile. After things settled down, we packed everyone up and moved to the camp a mile away. The four of us (his passengers) crammed into other boats, his empty boat dragged by Rick D. Our camp that night was at Nautiloid Canyon - site of Nautilus-like fossils. The broad, beachfront camp permitted everyone to camp in a line along the river near the boats and kitchen area. Rick D., Paul, and Rick H. spent most of the early part of the evening dealing with cleaning wounds and keeping bleeding down. I took my ritual soap-free sponge bath. After an amazing dinner of grilled salmon, I found myself repeatedly glancing over at Rick H's boat, catching him looking at his injuries in his mirror. Matt eventually took the videotape to him and they seemed to whoop it up, reliving those horrifying moments. Everyone else was somber, though. No one wanted to see Rick H. go septic and drop out of the trip - which we knew could happen. And so we all just seemed to be doing various versions of hoping and praying that all would be well. Rick H. would eventually address us with plans for the next day, making no reference to the status of things beyond. He was upbeat but clearly tired and in pain. It would be another early riser - with two hikes: one short one up Nautiloid canyon from the camp and another downstream - longer and up Saddle Canyon.



Left to Right: Nautiloid morning light, descending from brief Nautiloid canyon hike, Rick H. checks out his wounds

Miles 36-47: Nautiloid Canyon to Saddle Canyon

The next morning - much to our surprise - Rick H. was up and around AND leading the short but surprisingly difficult (at least for a few moments) hike up to look at the Nautiloid fossils. On one gnarly little pitch, Rick H. and Steve both hauled me up by the hands and assisted many others likewise. We literally had to scramble a class 2 up this rock wall to the second tier of the wash. Once we arrived up top, the rock was reminiscent of North Canyon. Rick H. poured some water on the smooth gray stone, revealing the glistening image of a cross-sectioned squid-like creature in an ovoid, chambered shell. More careful observations revealed dozens more Nautiloids - different angles, different sections... but all the same general form. We discussed the sad image of all these poor beasts struggling for their last breaths in some drying shoal... or dying suddenly en masse as a huge mudslide covered their habitat. The route we took down was different but as hairy as the route up - and included a neat little chute-like slide of rock. Above us, the layers of rock seemed less silent. We packed into the boats and continued down the canyon. Today, we rode with Rick D., who was much more serious and intent on talking about the geology of the canyon. Consequently, Jenn and I seemed intent on teasing him and flirting just a little (ha ha - there's an understatement). By now, it was clear that we were descending through different layers - and words like Coconino and Muav started getting thrown around. Rick D. had some serious mnemonic to remember all of them by and Jenn and I, over time, blasphemed it into something really dirty - only because we knew Rick D. (like Rick H.) had a blasphemous side. We also made lots of fun of his bilge-removing device - particularly in comparison with Rick H's and Matt's larger and more substantial apparati. Jenn also determined that pissing off the side of the raft was the worst for women because the spare oars got in the way. Of course, this provoked several remarks about pissing on Rick's shafts. I can't say we got much of Rick D's wild side out while on the boat but it we clearly unleashed him for future events. I'm certain he thought Jenn and I were absolutely insane and was, at the very least, surprised we held down serious careers in our usual lives.

We arrived at the base of Saddle Canyon around 3 p.m. and Rick H. announced we would be camping there for the night. We were to set up our tents and regroup for a 2-hour hike up to Saddle Canyon proper. The campsites here were the poorest on the whole trip: minimal, sloping shoreline. Once again, Jenn, Steve, and Mikkel opted for the BLAZING heat of the dry scrubland sites higher up. But I decided to brave it - given that Roy was also going to sleep out under the stars by the mighty river. Down on the water, the severe wind and lack of rocks made me question my decision. I fought my tent for some time, unable to keep it down, before I heard Rick H. summoning the hiking party to group near the boats. I gave up and left it in a heap under my bags. I was pulling up the rear as we climbed to Saddle (300 feet gained, 2-3 miles total). Fortunately, it was

late and most of the climb was in the shade. We ascended to the bottom of the redwall and then contoured through cactus and sage to a grotto of green. Acacia, ephedra, and sacred datura dotted the land along a meandering creek. We followed the creek, the redwall becoming taller and more forbidding as it closed in, pinching the head of the side-canyon. Eventually, the only way up was to get into the creek that, by this point, was murky black and dank-smelling. Watching others step nervously into the water and stumble over the unknown bottom, I knew this was going to be nasty shit. And it was: up to my thighs in disturbingly warm water (all I could think about was poliovirus, of all things). The tiers between levels in this canyon were more treacherous than those in North Creek - mostly because of the active flow of water. One tier involved stepping into the gush of moving water - which occupied a 10-inch smooth trough - and then friction climbing up the waterfall with your hands. The final tier was, by far, the most gnarly: an 8-foot vertical wall. The water rushed down one side that had little relief in it in terms of foot/handholds. Steve was waiting for me above and Rick D. was covering from below - literally placing my feet in the wet nooks and trying to coax me up. Detecting I was not pleased and may give up, Steve reached down and took both my hands, hauling me up full-body. Thought my shoulders were going to dislocate! A ribbon-like waterfall cascaded 20 feet down a sheer face from the impenetrable next tier. The narrow slot where we all stared silently was 10 feet wide, and the sliver of gray above suddenly began to fill with large raindrops. Matt, of course, waved his hands and started screaming: FLASH FLOOD! FLASH FLOOD! EVERYBODY RUN!!! I won't lie: the deafening sound of huge drops hitting miles of rock surfaces around us combined with the image of the sweating stone was nerve-wracking (no surprise there). It stopped within 10 minutes.



Left to Right: Saddle Canyon hike, in order

Getting back down the final tier wall was nasty. Gregory was so terrified that he became gripped and Steve wound up just handing him straight down the face to someone below. The pathetic thing was that right after being handed safely down, he slipped in his overexcitement to help his older brother, trying to descend the waterfall on his own. Steve eventually assisted me, playing the role of foot-placer from below, and I made it down fine. Most of the rest of the party made it down the trail faster than Jenn and I (all but one couple who seemed, through the course of the trip, to linger in grottos a good while after everyone else had left - no doubt corrupting some feature). Anyway - Jenn and I were making our way down, yacking the whole time about this or that. Jenn was in front and had just rounded this gooseneck bend and all I hear is "SHIT!" I then round the bend and all I see is Matt partly covered by this rock 100 feet in the distance. At the time, I thought she walked onto him with his pants down (not that his pants were not always slipping down that skinny ass). Only a few minutes later did I realize that Matt had planted a rubber snake on the trail and was videotaping her response. We all waited to see what Rick D. would do given that he was still behind us - but he only faked some overdone reaction that included beating the fake snake against the rocks. We made it back to camp and I finally got my tent up. Despite an amazing spaghetti dinner, I had a tough time taking a bath that night because of two problems: (1) this moat of algae-covered bedrock along the river; and (2) stumbling into the aforementioned lovers naked and washing up after doing deeds in the grotto. I also can't say I slept well. I kept hearing Roy either snoring or getting up to take night shots with his fancy camera. I also heard large things jumping into the river a few times (someone thought beavers). In the pre-dawn, a pack of coyotes also laughed eerily in the distance.



Left to Right: Nankoweap hike, view down to Colorado, first and last sections of trail

Miles 48-72: Saddle Canyon to Cardenas Creek

From Saddle, we set out for a modest whitewater day. Completing our guide tour, we rode with Nancy. After our first rapid, we pulled over to river right where famous Anasazi granaries (Nankoweap) were located. I had seen pictures of the trail to the granaries and was looking forward to the views provided by the climb. Of course, I was also intimidated by the cliff-like qualities of the trail. I hiked a good pace, keeping up with the fastest group. The way traveled through acacia and then climbed

steeply through boulders, cacti, and sage, eventually ending with edgy switchbacks along the step-like layers of sandstone. While a few things bothered me, I can't say I was THAT freaked out. Rick H. led brilliantly and gave a talk about the granaries (they could, if full, hold years of food for 20-40 people). Rick H. was doing and looking MUCH better. I hiked down with Rick H. and enjoyed comparing and discussing how we wound up in the Grand Canyon on our respective first times (this, for the record, was my first ever in the Grand Canyon - at least as an adult). Unfortunately, I had to pee like a racehorse and thus interrupted Rick H's enjoyment of a black collared lizard by apologetically excusing myself to piss on an ephedra. For the record, peeing was allowed during hikes if emergencies arose - provided that you went off-trail and on vegetation.

After Nankoweap, we continued through a long quiet stretch of the river. The weather turned to thunder and then light rain. The irony: the night before, I put all my raingear into inaccessible drybags. The shower turned to an utter downpour as we approached the Little Colorado. Guides were concerned this would make the usually turquoise Little Colorado red with silt. But this was not the case. The Little Colorado - we all agreed - was awe-inspiring. Most interesting to me, this blue water comes from within the sponge-like sandstone (I'm not sure whether it actually is an aquifer). High on the Colorado Plateau, the Little Colorado is nothing more than a dry riverbed (which we drove over on the way in). The only time it turns red is when there are high rains that rush down the dry channel, collecting silt en route. I put my hands into the blue water and it felt like a hot bath in comparison with the frigid main Colorado. As we stepped from the boats, though, the rain stopped COMPLETELY. If we wanted to swim, we needed to keep our life jackets handy. The hike up the Little Colorado was gorgeous but brief. In contrast with the side canyons we'd hiked so far, the gap cut by the Little Colorado was huge, wide, and worn down. We walked low slabs of sandstone that were like artful sidewalks above the miraculous water. The unreal blue river seemed more intimidating to float as I studied it: two shallow rapids and a substantial rock garden with fast water. Rick D. encouraged me to jump in. Having brought my camera (attached to my life vest), I made some remark about that (mostly an excuse to chicken out). Of course, he exuberantly offered to carry the camera back, recommending that Jenn and I turn our vests around (putting our legs through the arm holes) to protect our asses during the shallow sections. After accomplishing this feat (with lots of trouble), Jenn was convinced Rick D. was making this procedure up to make her look silly. Consequently, I decided to wear my vest in the normal fashion (of course, I don't have nearly the ass Jenn does). The float was interesting and made me more respectful of the water - although not fearful enough to freak me out once we got back on the big Colorado. During the rock section, the current pulled me towards many boulders and I found it hard to stay in the feet-forward position. After getting down to the rafts, Rick H. had shot something like 10 pictures of me no-doubt flailing. I felt I was usually more aware of people taking my picture or watching me and all of a sudden here is this very friendly forward man with my camera explaining he's been taking my picture all the way down the river during strangely intimate and introverted moment. Rick D. maintained this uncanny ability with both Jenn and I: to unseat us in peculiar ways. Two weeks after the trip, we still occasion to discuss his ability - and his tendency to go out of his way to do this - and haven't come to a precise consensus why - although we have several theories.



Left to Right: post- Nankoweap float, at the Little Colorado - rainstorm, hike, swim

We continued into the tourist portion of the Grand Canyon, where popular and car-accessible vantages overlook the river. At first, this area opens wide and the once regularly layered rocks appear broken and jumbled. We passed Furnace Flats but, thankfully, the sun was low and this area did not live up to its namesake. Somewhere in the distance, the North Rim viewpoint was visible - along with some large arch that no one seemed to be able to agree on in terms of a name. We passed by the campsite we intended to use, another party having beaten us. Up until that moment, I had felt fairly isolated on the river. We would see one oar-boat party a day and a couple motor tours. Today, though, we'd passed several rafting groups - including a huge private group of hippie bakeheads. At least 12 motley boats (actively adorned with colorful sun umbrellas) were lashed together and the number of dreadlocks and theoretical amount of pot was impressive - although the puffs of obvious smoke diminished as we approached to say hello. Notably, several of their women knew Matt. We floated down to a site 30 minutes away (Cardenas Creek). This site had a beautiful kitchen/universal area and all these social trails leading back amidst the acacia. Jenn and I chose a large, secluded site back in the trees for the 4 of us to share. Cardenas was the night I finally gave in and washed fully with Jenn's shampoo and soap. It was heavenly. Mugs work really well for pouring water over your hair. Given the big rain, the Colorado had changed from blue-green to milky red-brown. At first, I was concerned that this was going to ruin my bath but, in fact, it improved it. I brushed out my hair to dry it fully and then dressed especially nice (wearing my sarong like a muumuu), receiving several compliments from the males. Dinner was appropriate to my attire - grilled filet minion, potatoes, and green salad. Given that Herb and Nola were leaving tomorrow at Phantom Ranch, it was customary to send them out with the best (the crew repeated this the last night for us too). Jenn and I drank a lot of wine and sat out late on the river's edge. Rick H. set up candles and incense (his alternative to a campfire, illegal this time of year), around which most of us sat talking until quite late. Rick H. did his best to recite the "Cremation of Sam McGee" from memory - although he kept getting stuck on certain lines and then we'd joke about his head injury (it was clear, at this point, he was nearly recovered).

Matt read Native American creation stories that seemed more about the origin and function of sex and genitals than what westerners likely think of when we think of creation stories. And he almost read them with a straight face, believe it or not.



Left to Right: in the vicinity of Cardenas Creek, entering Upper Granite Gorge, Vishnu schist

Miles 73-95: Cardenas Creek to Vishnu Camp

From Cardenas Creek, we set out with Rick D., the day filled with large whitewater: before lunch - Unkar Rapid (class 7), Neville (class 6), Hance (class 9, the first we scouted), and Sockdolager (class 8). Rick D's flawless rowing made all these things seem effortless. He moved through the rapids and you didn't even get the impression he was trying. After Sockdolager, we entered Upper Granite Gorge, the point at which the oldest rock - Vishnu schist - emerges. Anyone who isn't impressed with Vishnu schist should be shot. Of course, all Jenn and I could think whenever we got near it was: wouldn't that be great for countertops or landscaping? Terrible, I know. Vishnu schist is super-heated granite that ranges in color from gray to black, from slightly rough to buttery hard and smooth. Where transient water falls down the faces, the Vishnu forms "human cheese grater" formations (Jenn's apt description). Rick D. went on and on about the schist - with good reason. I wish I was more cogent during everything but, frankly, I sort of turned my brain off on this trip. We rafted two more large rapids: Grapevine (class 8) and Zoroaster (class 7) before arriving at Phantom Ranch. Hitting even this miniscule pocket of civilization was affronting to our sense of timeless peace on the river. Of course, initially, we clambered up the hot (109° F), dry trail dreaming about lemonade with ice at the cafeteria whose claim to fame is (if you ask my friend Jay) stew and steaks. But sitting there with the people and the noise - we all wanted was to be back on the boats. At the visitor center, I called home to touch base with Bryan, leaving the following interesting message: "the river is small compared to what I was expecting... they are running it at 8K to promote fish habitats - so I wouldn't worry about any safety issues." Rick H. had, in some prior speech, warned us that everything was going to change following Phantom Ranch. And it did. Rick D. had also told us we were coming to one of his favorite rapids on the river - Horn Creek. Had I remembered my flip guide, I would have dubiously noted that Horn Creek is class 10 at 8K (the fine print adds: Horn Creek is not recommended between 4-10K). Rick D.'s calm and loving description of Horn Creek rapid in no way communicated how MASSIVE it was going to be. We left Phantom Ranch around 3:30 - later than planned because the guides assisted a hiker with serious heatstroke. But that was fine because this way too cute band of Euro-Boys with all length hair showed up, stripped down, and - ignoring prominent signs - jumped into the muddy Colorado. Incidentally, the band Euro-Boys is my latest fascination - and not just because they represent, in large part, Norwegians.



Left to Right: Horn Creek rapid from below, Rick D. (Steve in background), Vishnu Camp

Immediately after Phantom, the late afternoon light combined with the starkly narrower gorge placed us in a dark chasm of sorts - the walls along the thing were almost completely sheer. The river felt deep and boiling with immense power just below the surface. We scouted Horn Creek rapid as a large group of privates nervously descended the thing without stopping. This rapid impressed me as the first obviously massive drop in the river. Rick D. said that Powell spent days portaging Horn Creek, securing ropes along the walls to string and carry boats and supplies. The mass of whitewater roared - multiple gaping jaws of white arcing waves lapping at indefinably large holes. Perhaps I am remembering something that didn't happen (or happened elsewhere) but I believe Rick H. (who went down first) told Rick D. NOT to talk a certain route down the rapid (some riskier thing he wanted to do because he had us in the boat). When it was our turn, I was in the front of the boat with Jenn and Mikkel (this was the first time Rick D. requested 3 in front for safety and high-siding). I still remember the calm sensation of being drawn toward the tongue into the class 10 - that first slide into the raging hole. But the thing that impressed me the most was that all of a sudden EVERYTHING you used to see downstream vanished because all there was in front of us was a 12-foot wall of water. We rode the thing up partway and then crashed through, water over all of us in the front like nothing we'd experienced prior. While I've always had a reputation for being a screamer on whitewater, I increased my volume on Horn Creek and thus become the butt of many jokes from Steve and Rick D. I don't remember much about what happened after we burst through the gigantic wave other than that in-between feeling of Rick D. being just on the edge of out of control... all in solid white - until we passed out of the rapid and I consciously looked back at what was a waterfall. I will never forget that

image. After Horn Creek, we scouted and flew through Granite Rapid (class 9+) and then camped between 94-95 mile. The camp was called Vishnu camp and was one of the most striking camps because of the prominent waxy black rock everywhere - juxtaposed beside velvety sand that felt heavenly and rich between your toes. My sparing notes about that night say the words "chicken and rice" which evoke only specific memories about Rick D. cooking precisely that with vegetables.



Left to Right: Jenn in Slate Creek Falls, Elves' Chasm, 119 Mile Camp

Miles 96-119: Vishnu Camp to 119-Mile Creek Camp

We set out with Matt, who seemed glad to have us back again. Even so, Matt was a more reserved and tired. After 5 repeated days with at least one of the boys, his nerves were frayed. We encouraged him to get everything off his chest (the boys, his past, present, and future with women - one of which involved a beached dingy we passed). Sometimes Matt asked whether he should be talking about geology or history and we would laugh: no, no - we save that for Rick D. And then we broke into the Pixies (La La Love You - Oh YEAH). Today was another mostly-on-the-water big-rapids day. We scouted and slid down Hermit first thing in the morning (always nice when the sun hasn't hit the water and cold class 8 water is everywhere - NOT). Legendary Crystal was next. By the time we arrived at the scouting area, I found myself standing on the rocky shore looking down the thing going: what's the big deal? In contrast with Horn Creek, though, I felt that way even after going through Crystal (no big whoop - not even worth a picture). Matt was able, midway through Crystal, to eddy out on the far edge just below the first drop - an excellent spot from which to take pictures. Here, we also had our first close encounter with a rattlesnake: Matt, poking it with a stick after it crawled under a rock, remarked: hey, just trying to keep the wildlife wild. Following Crystal, we lunched at Slate Creek where a short hike lead us to a stunning waterfall. We continued through Tuna Creek Rapid and the Gem series. All of us took turns riding the bow, enjoying high waves full-body. We continued through a narrow gorge-like section before Waltenberg Rapid, the last big one (class 8) for the day. Elves' Chasm, the second short hike was visited near the end of the day. Elves' Chasm required briefly scrambling up interesting rock. The chasm was the effective dead end of the side-canyon. Adventurous swimmers (not me) could wade to the back of the chasm below the falls and then climb through a hole to some middle tier where then could then jump back into the deep pool cut by the falls. We continued to our camp at mile 119, one of my favorites because it occupied a LONG peninsula of flat sand. People set up a game of horseshoes and dinner included an amazing pasta/pesto dish with shrimp and sun-dried tomatoes. The only drawback: the toilet was in near full view if people took walks along the beach beyond a certain point. It is rather amusing to be sitting there on the can and have any number of people stroll by. It is, I decided, best to just wave because it actually embarrasses the strollers more.

Miles 120-135: 119-Mile Creek Camp to Deer Creek

The next day, we rowed with Rick H., now wearing his earring and shaving almost his whole face. He confessed he'd lost short-term memory following the injury, remembering only Rick D. and Matt. Today was a long whitewater day with many large runs through the Middle Granite Gorge: Fossil (class 7), Specter (class 7), and Bedrock - by which we lunched at a feature called the Doll's House. Bedrock was a complex rapid with solid rock forming the riverbed and gigantic schist dividing the river. A private party arrived after us, audibly arguing about cutting left vs. right. Matt befriended the most blasphemous private, borrowing his kayak to show everyone how it was done. The other blasphemous private was booby bikini'd blond chick, deemed "jailbait." At the time, she was down-climbing some schist - bending over WAY too often - and the male guides appeared so stunned while chopping vegetables that they were lucky they didn't lose any fingers. In terms of Bedrock: all but one private raft made it down. The last boat wound up stuck on the wrong side, unable to get out (Rick H. rescued them). Disgustingly, the rest of the party didn't wait. The rescuees asked if they could offer us anything and Rick H. said: lantern silks. The rescuees then added that they could use more peanut butter (we had none to spare). Thankfully, we didn't run into them again. We then ran Deubendorff (class 8) and Tapeats (class 7) before camping at mile 135 (Deer Camp) - just before the narrowest point in the Grand Canyon. The ominous skies never lived up to their bite. As with the prior camp, I have fond memories of Deer because it was spacious. Jenn and I made stone chairs by the river and bathed. That night was burgers, beans, and chips. It was also the anniversary of Jenn's father's death and so she and I talked for hours, Steve having ditched Jenn to wander off alone. As was apparent to many of us, Steve and Jenn were not connecting the way at least one of them had hoped. It was the first night Jenn and I stayed up just to gaze at the stars, the aforementioned clouds have vanished.

Miles 136-151: Deer Creek to Ledges Camp

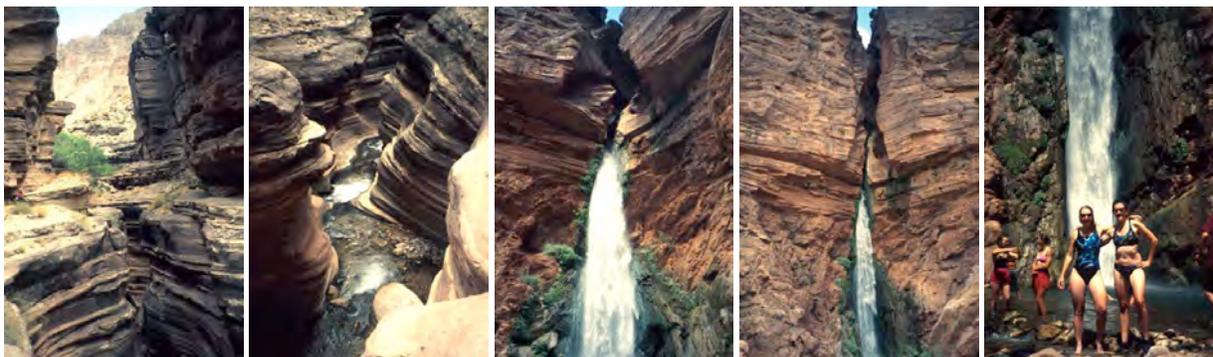
The next day involved a 4-mile hike from Helicopter Eddy to Deer Creek Falls (as we hiked high overland, the rafts traveled 1 mile downriver). Jenn and I set out with Rick H., Warren, and Warren's dad (Steve and Mikkel traveled with Nancy). Given that the sun was already beating down to the base of the Muav, I did question doing this hike. But I knew I'd regret it if I didn't. We floated 5 minutes to this nearly hidden cove where it was hard to convince me there actually was a trail. Using a bailing bucket, Rick H. smilingly poured water over several passengers. I preferred to douse my shirt in the river by hand. First, we climbed hand over hand on a jumble of rocks. Despite the wicked heat, I did well on the climb - sucking water down like there was no

tomorrow. As with Saddle and Nankoweap, the increasingly obvious trail climbed a zigzag of rocks in between cacti, ephedra, and sage. We leveled out on an impressive overlook on top of the Tapeats. Mentally, I convinced myself that this must be it for climbing. Ha ha. For awhile, the trail contoured a flat line along the shelf-like steps of stone. The trail then meandered through several draws - dropping/climbing in 50-foot intervals. All the while, I was having this discussion with the oldest of the boys about The Double Helix (assigned reading for the summer), trying to convince him that (a) Watson and Crick behaved unethically with regards to Franklin; (b) their notions that DNA represented THE ANSWER were short-sighted in light of McClintock's Nobel winning work on recombination; and (c) he should think about book in context more - because it was a stunning thing at the time (i.e. scientists talking subjectively about their indulgences). It took him awhile but he finally asked what I did and I replied: microbiology and molecular biology professor. After climbing, we came to a false summit and had to climb AGAIN to a final gap - which looked into Deer Creek basin (a parched bowl with a green ribbon of trees along Deer Creek). And so DOWN we went, enjoying lunch where the river began to cut into the layered stone. Nearly out of water, I wasn't into hiking another hour to this redwall spring. But Jenn encouraged me to go on, insisting she'd help with water. Famous last words. Several of us plowed up through the brushy grotto, legs scratching on the dry, thorny twigs overgrowing the way. We came to a camp with backpackers who had hiked down from the rim. Here, I lost Jenn and ran fully out of water. In my haste to catch up, I overexerted myself. At one point, I saw Jenn waiting and thought she saw me... but she did not. By the end (when I caught up to her), my head was throbbing and I nearly dry-heaved. We sat in the shade, filling Camelbacks directly from the source. I wish the source was more memorable - but it was not and I would not do it again.



Left to Right: colorful weather possibilities, Deer Creek camp, hiking to Deer Creek Falls

Hiking down Deer Creek Narrows, on the other hand, WAS memorable. After returning, Jay told me this hike is rated as difficult and scary. Had I known that in advance, I probably would have bowed out. Given that I made it, Jay decided that it must be tame and lame. Whatever. Deer Creek cuts into the Tapeats, forming a 50-foot chasm within the slightly wider main side-canyon. In many places, the trail traversed a 1-3 foot sandstone shelf above the narrower narrows - all under jagged, vertical walls. There were times I was face into the wall, holding on and inching around bulging rock. Nevertheless, the guides didn't make a big deal about any of this (hell, I never even saw them in this section). The place I DID suffer massive vertigo was where the narrows opened out onto the whole Grand Canyon. Although the trail was wider, it dropped straight and far down on the left (but you weren't, like, clinging to a wall on your right). Here, Matt was scaring everyone by looking right over the edge. I kept right on walking, unable to stop for fear I'd pull a fetal position. Next, the trail descended on a steep and sketchy climbers' route, scrambling through rock and trees where you had to hold onto branches and torque through brush on rock all at once. After that, it was pretty straightforward to the river. After all the interesting and amazing stuff coming down, I was NOT prepared for Deer Creek Falls. Those were, by far, the most spectacular falls we encountered on this trip. The falls exploded from the Tapeats via this deep rift in the laminated earth tones of rock (after too many jokes about the multitudes of phallus-like towers all over the canyon, Jenn and I determined that Deer Creek Falls was a strikingly female form). I would estimate the falls were 100 feet tall and 10 wide. The pool into which they fell was like something out of a tropical vacation brochure - clear, deep pool of blue-green. I didn't even stop: stripped to my swimsuit and jumped into the pool. The spray off the falls literally took my breath away as I tried to swim toward the falling water. Unlike me, a few people came close to swimming under the falls - including Rick D. who, on the way back, attempted to sneak up on me from underwater and haul me down. It was, needless to say, extremely difficult to leave the falls and the pool.



Left to Right: Deer Creek Narrows (trail, looking down), Deer Creek Falls - various, including Jenn and I

The rest of the day was spent on the water. Warren rowed, impressing us with his natural instincts and abilities. Rick H, meanwhile, sat and talked with Jenn and I, mostly on the topic of relationships. At some point, we had this wild conversation going: analogizing past lovers to rock layers in a canyon. I laughed and said - if a canyon represents my past, you wouldn't

call it Grand... you'd get one deep layer of schist and then a bunch of repetitive crumbles of some uniformly igneous intrusive. Rick H. said he found that hard to believe. I laughed, explaining that I was not short on interested parties, elaborating the most recent over-affected man (notably an oarsman) who planted a big wet one on me after two days on a rivertrip. To get Rick's focus off me, I suggested that he marry Jenn and Steve off because he was a captain and we were, technically, on a boat. Throughout everything, we ran primarily small rapids. I don't remember any except Upset, the biggest of the day (class 8-9). Rick H. obviously took the oars back from Warren for this one. We scouted the thing carefully and, from the river, it seemed very straightforward. Matt and Rick D. went down first so Matt could videotape our descent. Matt even felt confident enough to let Jan bow-ride. Watching them go down, things seemed simple to Rick H. - who then put Warren on the bow. We were the last ones down. I was in the back of the boat and all I remember was pounding into this HUGE hole and watching this wave towering above Warren. And then the water hit him and pounded him backwards and down. The entire boat instantly flooded knee-deep and you could feel the exorbitant drag created by the extra weight. I saw Rick H. flinch - mentally and physically - his shoulders tightening when he applied what he thought would be an appropriate level of force to the oars and got nothing... knowing we had to move NOW to get through the next series of holes. He gritted and moved - but it took much more energy than he was expecting. I was bailing as best I could and holding on for dear life. After we pulled through, Rick H. confessed that that caught him completely off-guard. I laughed and said I could totally tell by the muscles in his shoulders and the drop of his cheeks in profile during the run. We all gave Warren the testicular fortitude award.

We continued a half an hour more to the Ledges camp (mile 151). I continue to hold mixed feelings about this camp. It was in this deep, dark portion of the canyon, literally on ledges of schist. We had to make this elaborate and precarious fire-line up the rock - passing over several high ledges - to move all the gear even to the universal area. Getting up to the tent ledge I chose required scrambling beyond this. Needless to say, I was wit-scared about the prospect of peeing at night. The only good thing was that we didn't have the sun beating down upon us. Our night at ledges was raunchy. On most nights, while we all were putting up our tents, the guides engaged in their own little happy hour. After setting up my tent, I vanished to the groover for quite awhile. Indeed, I was in this groovy state when I heard Rick D. call my name a few times. After doing my business, I made my way down to the kitchen area to discover that Tequila shots were being dispersed. Plain shots would have been fine... but these were Tequila body shots (about which I knew nothing at the time - but suspected plenty). Of course, now I am thinking: SHIT, I've got Rick D. a-hollerin' after me to partake and, in contrast with Rick H., Rick D. does not appreciate that my experiential canyon ain't that deep. I evaded Rick D. while the actual couples defined what a Tequila body shot involves. Alright - it is SO time to go back to my tent. Of course, Mikkel - who is single - was then goaded into doing me. Both being body shot virgins, we did it for fun - although there was a little more mouth action than expected. And then Warren - also single and a body shot virgin - was getting teased. Given that he seemed like he needed someone empathetic, I had to let Warren do me. Well - I figured my work was done but Rick D. wasn't going to let me get away. I think that was one of those moments that just reminded me of being proverbially 16. After everyone had a turn (in my case, 3), it was suggested that there was no reason to stop. Fortunately, Jenn proceeded with her showstopper and I, thankfully, did not find myself sharing limes or lips with any more men I'd only recently met. Specifically, Steve tauntingly dared Jenn to take Rick H. down by the abs. All I will say - as stated to her that night: Jenn - you only did what the rest of us women would have wanted to do. After this hammed-up show, everyone ate dinner (Mexican fare). Later, I caught Jenn and Rick D. discussing my shyness and we all sat up talking a long time under the stars. Jenn and I musingly contrasted our backgrounds, our experiences, our pasts - how we interact with people in social settings (or how we avoid such things altogether). As always, Rick D. seemed to just absorb it all. Jenn and I would talk a lot about Rick D. during and after the trip - how captivating he was, how mesmerized he seemed watching us, how he seemed to tell you everything but (in contrast with other guides), we didn't know some key things about him (i.e. relationship history). At times, he struck us as a most worldly man and yet, at others, he was radiantly boyish - a dangerous combination, we agreed. But on the river - "all in good fun" - as he would say with a glint in his eyes.



Left to Right: Jenn and I fawning over Warren, Matt near Havasu, ocotillo during Havasu hike, unimpressive Beavers Falls

Miles 152-158: Ledges Camp to Mile 158 Camp

The next day - our leader's 35th birthday - was a long hiking day up the Havasu River. Several options were presented: hiking to Beaver Falls (6 miles total), hiking up to a swimming hole (2 miles total), or getting up late and not hiking at all. All but Barbara picked the latter option. We heard later from Matt, who stayed at camp to let Barbara sleep in, that he found a scorpion climbing on/up her pants while she had been sitting beneath some trees waiting for him to pack the boat. He apparently knocked it off, managing not to tell her until much later when they were on the river. In contrast with Barbara, the rest of us were up at the crack of dawn. Havasu River emerged around mile 156, 30 minutes downstream from camp. The HUGE side-canyon appeared suddenly and had a tricky entry (because a class 3 rapid was situated directly downstream). Boats were tied to a jagged vertical wall and we had to exit them by teetering along a narrow rock ledge to a stony beach along the rapid proper. No pun intended - but it seemed as though everyone was on edge all day. Even the guides seemed

frayed - by nothing in particular other than the critical mass of days on the river, the progression from romance to honeymoon-over. After a LONG and chaotic wait, our sub-party decided to proceed. For some reason, we were under the impression Havasu was straightforward. Ha ha. After clambering up some rocks, the supposed trail traveled along this ledge-like rock path reminiscent of Deer Creek Narrows. As usual, Steve and Mikkel took off WAY ahead of Jenn and I. We then hit this weird section with nasty scrambling that didn't seem right. Jenn and I decided we needed to cross the creek - particularly because we noticed Rick H. and others on the other side. We hauled the boys back and crossed, all holding hands. Just as we were stepping into the river, Warren caught up and so we took his hands as well. There was, indeed, LOTS of hand-holding that day. We joined Rick H's party and got all screwed up at this HUGE pool. Unfortunately, Havasu was NOT its usual glorious blue color (a la Little Colorado). Mountain storms had washed lots of shit into the river (and, microbiologically speaking, I do mean shit). We were warned that upriver sections collected lots of pollution, including agriculture run-off and untreated human waste. Most of these problems were blamed on land running through reservation land (I cannot confirm or deny this assertion, however). Nevertheless, the water was brown and stank of feces. The guides were right to require thorough bathing upon returning to the main Colorado (hell, I would have required hepatitis shots). They also did not recommend full-on swimming and were stern about things like opening your mouth or eyes in or near the Havasu if you did chance swimming.

Of course, having stated all these dire descriptions, we now HAD to get into this shit. Relatively speaking, prior river crossings on this trip had been tame (ankle to mid-calf deep). Although MOST Havasu crossings were easy, the first was a nightmare. First, we tried to cross on these skinny travertine terraces that defined this big wide spot (i.e. also the swimming hole hike option). We discovered quickly these weren't going to work. So, holding hands and teetering all the way back, we came to the realization that we were going to have to take this gnarly route where the vertical wall of the side canyon came down into the river. I went up to my waist (during which time I actively wondered how many diseases I could catch in my netherworlds and whether this was more risky than granola-dudes and oarsmen - take your pick). Hiking waist-deep lasted 50 feet and was made difficult because the water was dank and cloudy. You couldn't see the jagged wall ledges that you were suppose to step on. Consequently, the party bottle-necked here and, again, just beyond: at this bizarre tunnel in the rock. Getting up to said tunnel required major scrambling that frustrated the boys, some of whom were too short to step up things the rest of us could easily manage. In general, I was surprised how brazen the boys were in terms of cutting into lines, trying to be first all the way, and handing off their packs to people during difficult scrambles - despite being ill-equipped, out of shape, and thoroughly blistered. At least one of the boys received a foul-mouthed response from Jenn when he attempted to throw his pack to her. In general, too, I was surprised that this sort of behavior was still happening on day 10. The trail from the tunnel became, overall, easier but remained punctuated by these slide areas where recent flooding had wiped out huge sections of the trail. Each of these messes log-jammed our party because they required scrambling. Fortunately, Jenn made a welcome effort to hike with me that day, knowing I was concerned about heights, snakes, and heat exhaustion. Jenn and I were girly all day, holding hands every time we crossed the river and chattering away - often with Warren locked hand in hand, but quiet as a mouse. Halfway up, we were joined by Nancy, at which point we enjoyed a lengthy discussion about relationships. At some point, Nancy seemed to blurt, "what IS the deal with Rick D. anyway?" She assumed Jenn and I had him all figured out. By the end, we decided he must be rebounding from some major recent break-up. Who knows? (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT: a legitimate source told me that Nancy and Rick D. hooked up in 2001, although it is uncertain whether they are together still).

We hiked, held hands, and crossed Havasu 8-10 times, eventually arriving at this interesting fork. Here, the creek made a sharp turn, flowing from this sheer gorge to the right. The trail zigzagged up these cliffy ledges right before said gorge. The way eventually topped out amidst cacti, providing an encompassing view of the lower canyon. Glancing at the ground, I noticed a rattlesnake coiled by a nearby rock (stunning given that a dozen people had recently walked past). So we continued, following Nancy along this flat high trail. In the distance, the river came into view - along with Beaver Falls (totally lame: dirty and only 20 feet high). We dropped to them via this way ugly draw - one section of which required down-climbing 10 vertical feet on ragged stone (on which Mikkel gouged his foot). I arrived at the falls agitated, un-amused, and unimpressed. This trip was not worth the effort. Had the river been turquoise or had we hiked all the way to Havasu Falls - maybe. I downed my lunch, occupied with the fact that I still had to get back down. Despite warnings, several people did go swimming. But I decided to start back, Jenn and Warren following without comment. The only memorable moment was when I heard this weird noise that sounded like a cicada. Jenn immediately responded: MOVE NOW! Remarkably, I did exactly what she said. Only later did she tell me that that was a young rattlesnake - more dangerous than old ones because they didn't have the sense to let go after biting. Seriously, it is remarkable I wasn't MORE freaked out on this trip. I cannot tell you how many blind steps I took - over rocks that clearly had spaces under them, into brush where you couldn't see your feet... What if there had been a snake? I can't imagine. During that first night's talk back in Flagstaff, we had been warned that a snakebite would mean immediate helicopter evacuation. And yet - despite sometimes clear and present snakes and risks - I never stewed about that possibility long. Back at the Colorado, we washed the evil scum off our bodies and then found places to nap on the boats. As the rafts swayed in the current like cradles, I could understand why the guides liked to sleep on them at night. Once everyone returned, we rafted 2 more miles. Our camp (at mile 158) had a sloping amphitheatre where the kitchen was set up. Most people camped on tiny, crowded spots that were along the upper perimeter. Beyond said bowl, though, was this flat area where our sub-party camped. The drawback: we had to haul our gear a hell of a long way. But we had quiet, space, and a secluded cove for bathing. Given the latter, Jenn and I decided it was time for a full-on naked bath. So we hauled down with Jenn's supplies, laughing the whole time at the rivers' edge about when that motor-craft of all guys (either 20-something's or 60-something's) was going to sail past hootin', wavin', and hollerin' - OR when Rick D. was going to pop up from the schist, claiming he was taking an afternoon stroll (yeah, right). It may surprise folks to learn that, despite knowing each other for over a decade, Jenn and I had never seen one another naked. We were doing fine until Nancy showed up, stripping and making Jenn and I feel inadequate given that she was over 40 and was in WAY better shape. Dinner featured halibut, steamed vegetables, and a Dutch oven-cooked cake with chocolate frosting. We sang Rick H. happy birthday and several folks read appropriate stories or poems. Despite threats of a group spanking, Rick H. got away unscathed - although Jenn had already given him a good licking the night before. Tomorrow, we were warned, was the biggest rapid on this trip: Lava Falls. Sufficed to say, the guides tried to

scare us good. Matt read this story about how some party's gear raft full of tomatoes came loose in the middle of the night near our camp. The next day, all boats flipped while rowing Lava. After saving everyone and regrouping post-Lava, they found the tomato raft in an eddy downstream. It had run Lava unmanned and fully unscathed, not a single tomato lost or bruised.



Left to Right: Jenn and I comforting each other above Lava, Rick H's boat entering Lava, after running Lava

Miles 158-183: Mile 158 Camp to Mile 183 Camp

We set out with Rick D., whom we had reserved days before for the explicit purpose of running Lava Falls. Lava Falls (miles 179-180) was still a ways off and all I remember was a lot of yacking about geology, science, and law. While Jenn and I did not refrain from trash-talking Rick D's bilging-apparatus, we were more tame than usual (maybe we thought we should be nice to Rick D. so he wouldn't flip us). Eventually, we began passing black, dark lava formations that looked strange and out of place - as though the lava had spewed out of nowhere (which is pretty much what it did). Geologically speaking, the lava flows are recent (on the order a few hundred thousand years ago). Vulcan's Anvil, a giant volcanic plug, interrupted the flat river 10 minutes above Lava Falls. Shortly thereafter, we passed a side canyon that had once funneled so much lava into the Colorado that it dammed the river at this point for a few thousand years. Given how well the upper canyon had survived the lava dam, we hoped that Marble would soon burst so all the sediment up there would be washed away equally well thereafter. Just prior to Lava Falls, we hiked the scouting trail and spent a long time looking down at the weirdly large rapid. Indeed, Lava seemed wildly big considering how innocuous the rest of the river had been the past 24 hours. Honestly, this afternoon was eerie in the sense that we had seen no one all day - and now we were about to do one of the largest and most famous navigable rapids in the world. Exacerbating the situation, the guides were discussing things at length and hugging each other gravely. And if that wasn't bad enough, Roy (who had done the river before) decided to walk this one (it is one of the few you CAN walk, for the record) - although he claimed it was because he wanted to take pictures from the side... not because he was afraid.

Rick H., Matt, and Sven, went down first and all went well. We waited for first-round teams to get to the lower viewing area/trail. Nancy went down next and we would be last. Mikkel, Jenn, and I were placed in front - Steve in back. Of all the rapids, I remember every second of Lava: we slowly floated to the roar. Disturbingly, the rapid was not visible until you were right there. MANY holes and waves were navigated and then I remember seeing this HUGE swirling hole (bigger than anything so far). Matt exclaimed, "SHIT - he's doing the (something) hole!" (heard on a video of our run, viewed that night). The downstream wave was 12-14 feet and we started climbing it - its surf threatening to push us back and/or fold us. In contrast with other comparable moments, I was dead silent. There was this extended moment where we paused and I wondered whether Rick D. was going to pull this off because it could have gone one of several ways - pushing over/through, sliding back, or folding and sliding all at once. Well - Rick D. pushed us through, 8-10 feet of wave crashing over the whole boat. Jenn lost her hold and said it was her closest moment to being thrown from the boat. We thrashed through more tumultuous whitewater, Rick D. satisfied in an appropriately humble way. We all thanked and thanked him because it was clear he had taken some risk with us that perhaps he wouldn't have done with another party. Of course, he insisted he didn't intend to land the big hole because the upper part of the rapid makes it hard to intentionally do anything. But when he saw he had the chance, he took it. The rest of the boats emerged from the shore and the other guides seemed impressed with our big run. We proceeded to Lower Lava, a cliff-hugging series of huge waves that curved against a tight corner of rough canyon wall. I screamed down the whole bloody thing and Rick D. teased me about this - particularly given how stunned silent I was by Lava Falls. We camped a short ways down from Lava near mile 183, the site lovely and broad - allowing us to spread out along the high sandy shore. For dinner, we enjoyed a turkey dinner with all the fixin's. After dinner, we were told that it was customary for passengers to put on "Lava Follies." Given that we hadn't been properly warned the night before, however, we were advised to come prepared tomorrow. After talking with Jenn late into the night, I wondered if I had any talents that were amenable to follies. All I could do these days was lecture - pretty boring (although my STD lectures, I have been told, are something else). After watching Jenn and Rick H. ham it up with their flirtatious antics, I was feeling insecure with my level of entertainment value.

Miles 183-212: Mile 183 Camp to Fall Canyon

The next day - at Matt's request - we rafted with him. He was tired of dealing with the kids, whom he had (again) entertained every day since we last rafted with him. Honestly, though, I don't remember much from that day. I know we stopped for a short hike to look at some pictographs. I know we ran at least one class 7 rapid. But I was asleep most of the day, having not slept much the night before. I had been blown away with an early period - well-described in the grooving section. Upon arriving in camp (surprisingly early), I immediately set up my tent and took a 2-hour nap. I nearly missed dinner - amazing Dutch Oven lasagna prepared by Rick D. Given the nightmarish day dealing with severe pain and roadkill, I was not in a folly-mood (to say the least). Rick D. asked if I'd at least be in his skit, claiming all I had to do was stand there while he recited Shakespeare. I

agreed but when the time came, I was - you guessed it - grooving again. Rick D. would tell me he was pretty worried about my state that day. Indeed, the cramps, iron loss, and sleep-deprivation had drained me of everything.



Left to Right: Nancy's raft, Jenn re-enacts grabbing Mikkel during the water fight, final camp post-shower

Miles 212-238: Fall Canyon to Mile 238 Camp

The next day, Jenn, Jan, and I rafted with Nancy, who had hoped to run the day with all the women. Barbara, however, did not want to part with Gregory. There were also rumors about a gender-based water fight, scaring away the mother/daughter teachers. While Rick H's boat appeared to be the nucleating point for guys discussing strategy, they had two weaknesses: Gregory (youngest) and Barbara (fairly immobile). However, we decided that we were going to pound them regardless if the guys made an offensive move; Barbara been a good sport and she seemed to be excellent at holding on. We then noticed ALL the water guns (ignored up until this day) had been moved to Rick H's boat. All of a sudden, we decided we needed to change our strategy from defending ourselves against the macho guys to offensively plastering Rick D's boat (Warren, Warren's dad, and Gregory's brothers) because they would not be expecting it. Our plan: keep close to Rick D - then go for the soak. Jenn's goal was to enter his boat and throw him overboard. Well - after a peaceful morning, we rounded a bend to find Rick H's boat was laying in wait. An immediate brawl took place and was sustained for over an hour. Many things happened, most illegal or unadvised according to river safety rules. But we were on flat water. Of the dozens of throw-overs, the most impressive was Steve picking up Nancy by her life-vest, and hurling her into the water. I lost track of how many times Gregory got thrown. At one point, Steve came after me because I had a water gun (we did wrestle a few away). He tried to throw me over but I wrapped myself around his leg and would not let go. And so I have still not been thrown into the Colorado by any force (a little disappointing). In her efforts to take Rick D., Jenn got into hand-to-hand combat with him but lost and found herself in the water. I took extreme amounts of water in the face and hammered dozens of people with buckets of water (more effective than water guns). The best, worst, and most bawdy moment was when Mikkel entered our boat and stole one of our guns back. Just as he was about to get away, Jenn got into hand-to-hand combat with him and both wound up overboard. Rick D. yelled: "go for the nuts" - which Jenn did until he handed over the gun. We figured there must have been a lot of pent-up emotions between everyone after 12 days. The guys did commend the galz because we put up a really good fight. There were no winners or losers - except for Mikkel's nuts. Unfortunately, I have no pictures because I had long hidden my camera, knowing it was going to be bad. We are not sure how Sven/Robert, and Matt's boats escaped. After calming down, we stopped to hike this side canyon (forgot name). The entrance was so steep that the guides fixed rope up a 10-15 foot section of rock. Our hike terminated in a spectacular waterfall within a sphere-like cathedral of stone. Despite being soaked, we all still jumped into the water. Within 15 minutes, we hit our last major rapid (class 7-8) - scary because Nancy lost her oars and we hit a huge rock. After 235 miles, we needed a moment of real terror to remind us that this was dangerous. We reached camp 15 minutes later.

The weather was decent until we were all in the middle of setting up our tents. At this point, a biblical but short-lived shower pelted the canyon walls, forming waterfalls on the rock. Jenn and I had to build a diversion channel for the sand-rivers threatening to flood my tent. In the act of building, we noticed how hot the water coming off the rock was. I took advantage of this by pulling out my washcloth and taking a hot, heavenly sponge bath. Dinner was another grand finale: filet minion, green salad, potatoes, AND a chocolate cake. Jenn and I did our best to drink all our remaining wine and then most of us sat on the beach, shooting the shit about the excellent day. Everyone was in great spirits, realizing we weren't quite ready to leave. I received everything Rick H. avoided on his birthday: bawdy speech (from Jenn), dance (from Matt), big embrace (from Rick D.), and spanking gauntlet (from all men of age - although I could NOT believe sweet Warren was among them). Yes, I have glossed over a lot (enough said). My head spinning, I began a conversation with Matt and Jenn while lying in the ducky - during which, at some point, I apparently fell asleep. Jenn said they were going to leave me there all night but Matt decided to jump on me with his "bow-chicka-bow-now" (signature porn riff). I did, eventually, make it back to my tent. Not surprisingly, I did not sleep much or well. I was awakened by rustling and started imagining a mountain lion - because the guides said such felines did frequent this area. Eventually, I took a long walk to the groover, WAY on the other side of the camp, spawning the opening story from the groover section. Indeed, that was the moment I realized we'd all bonded - regardless of whether we knew any terrific details about one another. Maybe it was that realization that enabled me to peacefully go back to sleep finally.

Miles 238-280: Mile 238 Camp to Pearce Ferry, Lake Mead

The last day was an emotionally trying day. On one hand, I wanted nothing more than to sleep in a bed (anything without sand would suffice), take a real shower, and eat something ice cold. On the other, I was not ready to leave the river and the people with whom I'd become entwined. After breakfast, the guides lashed the rafts together with an outboard motor for our final leg together to Separation Canyon. Everything was coming apart in a fast, loud, and affronting way. Suddenly, there was this deafening roar as the motor cut the red water. We were no longer intimately talking with 4-5 others per boat. We were not

thinking about where our camp would be, what hike we'd be doing, or what meal we'd savor. After an hour, we saw our destiny: the jet boat curving smoothly but unnaturally up the river to whisk us away in one swift motion, punctuated only by brief embraces as we exchanged one vessel for another. Nearly speechless, the only words I managed to say were to Rick D. - Thank You for Everything. I held together 5 minutes and then spent the next hour weeping. Although this freaked Jenn out, Warren smilingly put his arms around me: "Sarah - that is so wonderful... that this touched you that much." I cried more when he said/did that. The jet boat was surreal - like an IMAX movie, only you were not in a theatre. That there was still a canyon all the way to the end was stunning and surprising. Lake Mead was not the barren desert I thought it would be based on its damnable origins. There was something actually beautiful about it. We arrived at the Pearce take-out at noon and drove 4 hours back to Flagstaff - through forests of Joshua trees that evoked images of Dr. Seuss and U2's "Where the Streets Have No Name." Unfortunately, the guides were not able to have dinner with us back in town... which was very sad. This trip, more than ANY other I've ever been on, fucked with me at all levels. Menstruation problems aside, it took an entire month for me to approach 90% in all categories of the body, spirit, and mind. Constantly freezing post-Colorado, I had to wrap myself in quilts, shivering and napping 1-2 hours a day. I also suffered this wild sleeping schedule - going to bed around 7:30 p.m. and getting up at 6 a.m. - always exhausted. Of course, I had this maddening crush on Rick D. that expressed itself via wicked dreams (bow-chicka-bow-now) for weeks. Consequently, I had to analyze my psyche, feelings, and pasts in that regard. But like I said way back when: this trip was about personalities as much as it was about the land, river, and heat.



Left to Right: joined and motorized rafts, the Rick's motoring, Jenn and the jet boat at Pearce Ferry

Epilogue

Written in late 2001, I added this paragraph after being asked to update the above story (I won't say by whom): specifically, to make it clear that Jenn and Steve never got married; in fact, they split up a few months later after 9 years together. Given this fact, I must recount my sage friend Roger's foreboding question, posed immediately after I returned from this trip. Knowing I had gone with then-engaged Jenn and Steve, Roger asked whether their relationship survived intact. Having gone down the canyon with several couples years ago (a number of whom divorced in a timely manner after going down the Colorado), Roger defended his question on his premise that that river does interesting things to relationships because it so rawly exposes peoples' differences. At the time, my answer to Roger was yes, although I admitted the river tried them a great deal - as it did all of us. Nevertheless, it was clear before and during the trip - in terms of Steve and Jenn - that the decision to go, and the enthusiasm about going was very asymmetrical. I don't know what Roger connoted from my private replies to his question but he was, in no way, surprised to hear about the fiancé-ending events of June, 2001. Even though Jenn and Steve are no longer together as a result of marriage/family choice and value differences, I do think the Colorado served as an interesting catalyst. Perhaps because it cast a very intense light on their being a couple in a demanding situation (physically, mentally, and socially). Perhaps because it removed all the usual crutches of work and school that separate couples, allowing them to hide or ignore differences. Perhaps because, like the fundamental marriage/family issue, the Colorado's supreme beauty and power and value was not something equally worshipped and sought by both of them. All I know: Jenn and I will go down the river again... snakes, heat, tequila, prominent abs, daytrippers, and everything else the Grand can blow our way.

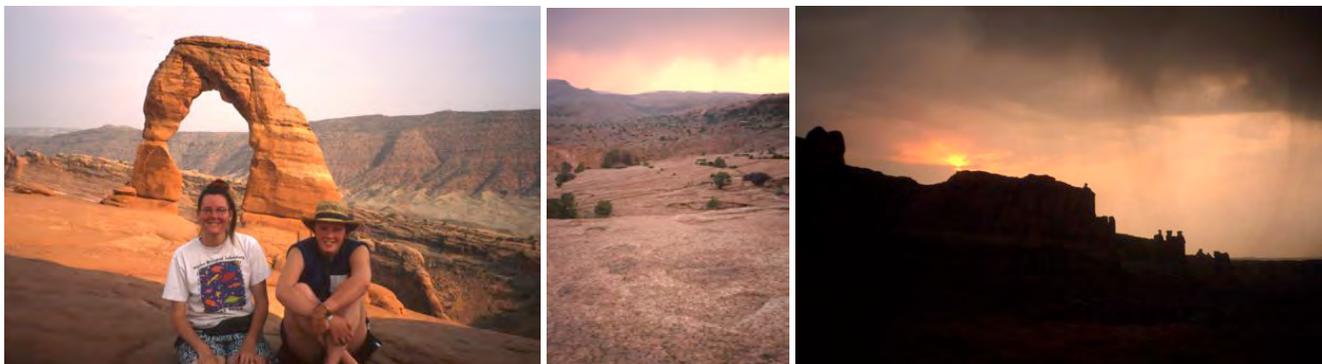


Left to Right: camp 2, camp 1 sunset, Canyonlands/Cataract team at Lake Powell/Hite Marina take-out

Utah's Canyonlands with the Four Oarsman of the Apocalypse - June, 2002

This report could begin any number of ways. Early on, I favored the serious telling of my youngest sister's birth - which had many symbolic ramifications in terms of this trip. But later, I just wanted to open with: we didn't know what was hotter - the river or the oarsmen (and then explain any number of ancillary discussions enjoyed as we floated down the disappointingly tame Colorado through Utah's Canyonlands. Some time during the first week of January 1984 - I remember it to this day - I was standing in my family's kitchen. It was breakfast on a school morning and I was 15. My mother, dressed in her lemon

yellow bathrobe, looked at me and stated with great precision: "I can't stand the coffee " (she normally downed 6+ cups a day, down from a dozen a few years back). I shrugged and she said it again, adding "you know what that means?" I still could not fathom. She finally huffed: "I think I'm pregnant." My first response (HOW?) did not reflect my ignorance regarding sex; rather, I did not understand how my parents could have conceived given that they were both 43 and that my dad - 3 months before - moved away to take a military job out of state (thanks to the oh-so-generous Reagan administration - NOT). My mother's response: he WAS here at Christmas. Nine months later, Allison was added to the family. The surprise. The accident. Interestingly, Allison was the only child born in my father's presence. I don't pretend to have been a good or close sister to Allison while she was growing up. When she turned 1, I was in college. At 5, I was in graduate school. At 12, I was in Oregon. Suddenly, Allison (whom I frankly didn't know at all) was graduating from high school, about to move away for college. And so I asked her to go with me down the Colorado through Canyonlands at high water, when legendary flows average 30,000 cfs and rival even the Grand Canyon. Allison, a professional lifeguard and camp counselor, seemed an excellent choice for a river trip. Allison accepted the trip offer quietly, not certain whether she'd enjoy this kind of thing given that she'd never seen the desert. She did comment that many of her friends - none of whom were savvy about outdoor trips - were concerned about her safety. But I assured her that we were more likely to be killed on the road than during what her friends thought were high-risk activities (white-water, flying in a small plane between Powell and Moab, snake encounters). One relevant interlude before proceeding: the SAME day I reserved this trip, Jenn called me up: "I have news." In contrast with the story about me mum, I KNEW what Jenn was going to say. My immediate response: OH MY GOD - YOU ARE SO KNOCKED UP!!!! And she was - by her free-ballin' Montanan George. Unfortunately, her due date was RIGHT in the middle of this trip (she had hoped I'd be there for the birth). Like I said to an Oregon friend: I think I'd rather be on the great red river than in the great red river. Hopefully, she'll forgive me - not only for that awful line but also for running off with Allison.

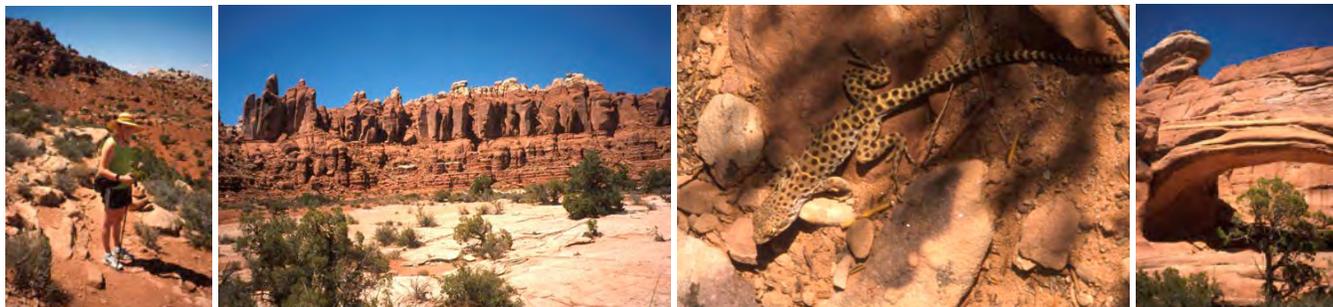


Left to Right: Delicate Arch, big sandstone ramp heading down from Delicate, Three Gossips

Prelude to the Four Oarsman of the Apocalypse - June, 2002

This report describes the pre-rafting portion of Allison (16 years my junior) and my trip to Moab - our first trip traveling together (but, by no means, our last). For a more thorough introduction and the rafting portion, visit the Colorado collection. My father dropped Allison off at my place on June 20. Having spent the last 48-64 hours at all-night graduation parties, Allison went straight to bed and I suffered a minor mid-life crisis because suddenly I felt out of place, uncertain whether we'd have much to say - and convinced I was too old to have anything in common with an 18-year old. Only an hour-long chat with Diane calmed me down - mostly because she has an 8-year-older sister with whom she has shared many mid-life crises (usually caused by one another). Later, Allison and I packed and cooked/age Yakisoba with vegetables and tofu. Despite Allison's claimed vegetarian status, she ate meat with virtually every subsequent meal. We hit the road around 10 the next day, our goal being somewhere in southern Idaho. Prior to this trip, Allison had - seriously - not driven freeway longer than 1 hour. Armed with at least a 100 punk- or dance-oriented CDs (only 10% of which I recognized), however, she seemed at ease. I drove to Pendleton and handed her the car until Twin Falls, where we got one of the last rooms in town after driving WAY south into the sticks. The elderly male owner of the place joked that we must be out scamming for men - which was amusing given that we'd played "It's Raining Men" many times that day. I'm never sure what people make of Allison and I. When I was in my early 20's, I was often mistaken for Allison's mother. Recently, I took advantage of this by playing a dirty trick on Bryan, pretending to confide in him that I had gotten knocked up when I was 16 and Allison was, in fact, my daughter. I then went on to explain that my folks took care of her so I could stay in school and on-track with my career. To this day, Bryan still wonders if I'm kidding. But anyway - after unpacking, Allison and I headed to this Chinese restaurant where we had something called a bird's nest - before going to bed. The next morning, we hit the road at 9:30. After Allison drove to Spanish Fork, I took over to Green River - all new terrain to me. I enjoyed it until we arrived Page, home of endless speed traps - followed by 60 miles of ugly nothingness with no facilities. Making matters worse, the weather grew big, windy, and overcast. Despite said problems, we arrived at Moab shortly before 5. We agreed to head straight up to Delicate Arch - despite ominous skies. Allison took to the trail well - despite the muggy 85+ temperatures (we were thankful it wasn't 110). The powdery white-blue-tan sky was eerie and looked like it should smell like smoke. We followed half a dozen 20-something's up the trail, happening upon bighorn sheep after leaving the big open slab section. From there, we climbed to the Delicate amphitheatre - which, eventually, we enjoyed by ourselves. Allison seemed quiet but in a speechless way. Not subjected to hiking the way Ellen and I were growing up, Allison has definitely inherited the outdoor gene. After an hour, we descended as lightning struck in huge, chaotic forks against the buttes across the valley - each followed by crackling thunder. And then gigantic drops of rain fell, spotting the sandstone ramp in leopard-skin and scenting the air with this intoxicating smell (fresh rain, earthy soil, hot desert). Although this was my fifth time to Delicate - today was my favorite... despite the nontraditional skies and light. Stinky and sweaty, we made our way to our hotel home for 3 nights. After a fair Mexican dinner, we enjoyed excellent ice cream at

this parlor run by a bunch of hippie/grunge 20-something guys raising funds and awareness for the Drain Lake Powell campaign (indeed, Moab was quite the haven for WAY too many cute dirty-hippie-grunge 20-something guys). The weather forecast predicted that temperatures would go from 90 to 108 over the next week.



Left to Right: Klondike Bluffs area - Allison on trail, Marching Men, desert lizard, Tower Arch

The next day, we slept in until 10. After yogurt and bagels, we went shopping. Despite an over-filling lunch of ice cream sundaes and onion rings at Denny's, we did something stupid-sounding: hiked Tower Arch via off-road Klondike Bluffs at solar noon. We did have the sense to inquire as to the appropriateness of this road for my car. Arches' main off-road region features a loop that heads out across Salt Valley. Midway around is Klondike - half the loop standard gravel dirt road, the other high clearance 4WD. As anyone (including me) will admit: the Subaru Forester may be 4WD and higher clearance but it's not an ORV. And so it was no surprise when the ranger suggested we stick to the gravel road - her exact words: "we had to pull a real jeep out of 2 feet of sand on the 4WD section and I don't think you or anyone should be messing around beyond the gravel." The gravel access point took off to the left from between Fiery Furnace and the Devils Garden Trailhead, neither of which we visited on this trip. Although Klondike was only 7.7 miles in, it felt VERY long - most of the way BAD washboard. Given that Allison had never driven a dirt road, I let her drive back, after seeing the route and how I drove it (not that I am a good model for driving gravel roads). I can't say the drive was scenic. I am only proud to say I did it because we were, like, the only ones out there and so we looked burley kicking up so much dirt across this huge expanse of scrubby high desert. Unlike the road, the trailhead was scenic and offered a good pit toilet at the base of this big red wall. This hike, more than any other in Arches, truly felt like a desert walk in the middle of nowhere. Although it was only in the low 90s, it felt like 105 - exacerbated by the fact that the trail immediately climbed 500 feet on sun-baked sandstone. Here, Allison was FAR more worried about running into snakes. Thus, I took the lead and, using my walking sticks, poked under rocks. Tower Arch was 1.7 miles away. After climbing steadily, we eventually reached a plateau with views of the Klondike Bluffs: huge, weird, soaring red sandstone - sheets and bulbous masses, the occasional contrasting capstone of white or black. While Klondike, home to Tower, erupted to our right, the Marching Men paraded majestically to the south - the 2 features separated by a river of sandy desert that we would cross (after a slight descent). Here, a couple returning from Tower informed us that we still had a ways to go. Afterwards, we climbed a sand hill that took us into massive, shady fins that rivaled those in the Fiery Furnace. After passing a sign/branch trail (0.5 miles from the ORV road), we continued on the main trail, arriving at Tower 2 minutes later. Although the couple insisted Tower was the finest arch in the park, I still think Delicate is the best. Tower did receive higher marks for solitude and its great view. Tower was also very thick, formed from several layers of fused fins. It is not out there on its own like Delicate; rather, it is close to a wall and difficult to photograph. You can climb right into the thing, though, and lie back in the shade on the cool sandstone - while looking out the thick windowpane of glorious stone. After 30-40 minutes as such, I can't say the hike back was memorable - other than being fucking hot. On the drive out of the park, we briefly visited the Windows section. After 4 hours of peace, though, the Windows SUCKED - HUGE crowds of gawking and inept tourists. Feeling a little broke, we hit the excellent grocery store deli/salad bar for dinner. Here, Allison's penchant for Jell-O with Cool-Whip was disgusting and I had to remind her that gelatin was made from cow hooves and noses.

The next day, we headed for Island in the Sky, proceeding straight to Aztec Butte. It was around 10 when we started hiking, Allison skeptical of making it up "that big thing in the distance." En route, I ran into a former student - proving the world is small. In contrast with my previous trip up Aztec, I was determined to see ALL the granaries (including the dicey ones under the capstone). When we came to the edge, Allison initially lost her nerve as I scampered down this chute that looked like it was going to slide into nothingness. Ten feet down, though, it cut hard right, where cave after cave of white sandstone was partially walled with flat stones piled and packed with mud. Allison did join me, seeming more moved than me by the impressive structures and vistas. At a few points, the cliff-hanging path narrowed to 2 feet wide - with ball-bearing rocks to throw your balance. From Aztec, we continued for an abbreviated walk along Grandview Point. The views here seemed better than last time but the cliff bothered me as much as before (which amused Allison to no end). We then hiked to Mesa but this impressed me less than before. Given that it was hotter than shit, we went back to Moab and ate more ice cream. To read about the rafting (and then flying) portion of this multi-modal transportation trip, go to the Colorado Rafting Collection.



Left to Right: (top) scrambling up Aztec, under capstone; (bottom) granaries, final shot along Grandview Point

After a sweltering day hiking in Arches, we met our trip leader (Dano) and one of the 3 other guides (Jesse) who comprised the Four Oarsman of the Apocalypse. Frustratingly, half the passengers had been given misinformation by the hotel about the meeting location - and so they arrived late. Dano, the oldest and most reserved of the crew, looked like a contractor on This Old House. Dano contrasted with Jesse (age 25), who grew up in Eugene - and initially reminded me of Grand Canyon Matt (both seemed insane and irreverent). Unlike Matt, though, Jesse never opened up much and his antics were more superficial and sartorial. In general, I find younger males to be more guarded than older males, something I chock up to some insecurity/identity/self-awareness thing that hasn't finished cooking. Jesse was also DDG and, at times, I had this sense that he sort of knew that (Matt, while delightful to watch, was not DDG). After many years of dealing with DDGs (safely afar and spacelessly near), I think it's less of a blessing for a man to be DDG; it gives them too many options, confuses them, and hinders personal development. Not that they are not fun to look at. Lastly, Jesse showed up wearing an ankle cast, provoking a few questions from passengers. Most of us were relieved to hear this was a skiing accident, not Cataract Canyon. We returned to our hotel room, ammo cans and dry bags in hand. There, Allison and I agreed that, indeed, Jesse was too cute for his own good. For some reason, I wouldn't have predicted that Allison and I would ever even jokingly spar over any man. But there we were one-upping each other (he's too old for you; he's too young for you). Despite hopes to retire early, we found ourselves at the Drain It Now ice cream parlor (our third time to this anti-Powell fund-raising establishment) as twilight fell. And, of course, we had to flirt with the boyz at counter who, by this point, knew our names. They seemed hurt to hear we were going to vanish down the river for 6 days - although most of their pain derived from the idea that we were going down the river and they weren't. Oh well. The ice cream boyz paled in comparison to the oarsmen. We would have been more motivated to get a good night's sleep if Dano hadn't given us a 7:45 meeting time - being only 1 hour from put-in.



Left to Right: day one floating, lunch, and first evening in camp

River Day One

The next morning felt far hotter than any of the previous days - bad, given that the forecast said it was only going to get worse over the next week. Down at the OARS office, we waited briefly before loading onto an old school bus. I am embarrassed to say - after 3 times to Moab now - that, until this trip, I NEVER understood where the Colorado flowed in terms of leaving Moab and entering Canyonlands. We drove 10-20 miles down to Potash, a chemical plant that extracts salts from the rock/ground for things like fertilizer. There was only one other small canoe party at the put-in, which generally looked and felt like Lee's Ferry. In contrast with the Grand (and, yes, I will constantly make comparisons to THAT trip - something that drove the

oarsmen crazy), we went down in only 4 rafts (no gear boat and no swampers). One of the guides, however, did bring a friend who worked as an unofficial swamper, paying for his own food in some likely-under-the-table manner that irked a couple passengers. We also carried down ALL our own drinking water because the upper Colorado has so many nasty silts, salts, and metals. Tales of oarsmen getting full-body Staphylococcus infections during low water runs were neither uncommon nor comforting. Allison and I had asked whether the crew would be bringing a ducky. Initially, the OARS office said they wouldn't because there was so much flat water (the river was an astonishing 3,000 cfs and dropping). However, Dano said he'd get one - and he did. Allison and I took to inflating and packing it while others loaded onto respective rafts. Unfortunately, our early pre-occupation with ducky-ing (and getting to know one another after all these years) initially kept us from interacting with the guides and passengers. Of course, I warned Allison that I really sucked at paddling - and I did. I can't say the river or canyon was uniquely scenic that first day. I haven't seen so much flatwater since rowing and surviving the John Day. In contrast with the Grand, the beaches along the upper Colorado were gentle and broad, many choked with tamarisk and willow. We had been warned that we would find ourselves bottomed out in shallow water on sandbars but, ironically, this seemed to happen more during the latter part of the trip (i.e. when damned Lake Powell silted backwards up the river). That first afternoon, Allison and I spent most of the day yammering about family history and religion. Allison also took to singing all these YMCA camp songs (indeed, I was reminded that "C" stands for christian when several of her tunes took on religious overtones). After she sang the original, she would perform the camp-counselor-corrupted version (adulterated with secularly sexual overtones). Her most amusing song had this line: "love is something when you give it away (woooo) give it away (woooo), give it away (woooo)." This piece didn't need any corruption as it stood completely on its own. We could not decide, however, whether "lust is something when you give it away (woooo)." Regardless of our tendencies to corrupt wholesome songs, I think I was definitely feeling a little inundated with evangelical references to the lawd. Amen.

I remember no other specifics about the day but I will make several brief comparisons to the Grand. When peeing, the guides suggested jumping fully IN the river to do our business. At first, I was concerned that our group would NEVER bond if we weren't made to excrete in front of one another while dangling off the edge of a raft. Over time, I thought it was weirder to be standing, neck- or waist-deep in the river, having some conversation with someone next to you and taking a piss. Hmmm - is that rush of warm water yours or theirs? Excretion issues aside, we were encouraged all the way down the river to get in the water. Miles and miles and miles were spent floating and swimming and peeing in the Colorado. It took me a whole day to get used to just jumping into the water. Every other trip I've done has involved stern rules about staying in the boat. Now here were all these crazy people jumping overboard every hour just to cool off. I swear there were extended moments when I was the only one in a boat. After getting used to being in the river, there was something baptismal and intimately sensual about the relationship we had with the water on this trip. When I was younger, I swam every day as part of my regimen for scoliosis. Although this act represented freedom from the brace, I can't say swimming filled me with fond memories. During the last stressful years of graduate school, I took to swimming again. In this context, I loved the peace it gave me and I realized that it brought back fonder memories of a period of my childhood that, at the time, seemed filled with despair. Unfortunately, during the really depressing first month post-John, an older professor had a heart attack and died in the lane next to me. I could feel death in the water as I realized what was happening. Consequently, I never went back to the pool again. Jumping into the Colorado on this trip with all these wonderful people - and I know this is weird - made me realize that you feel life in the water too. At nearly 80° F, the water, indeed, felt almost human. I'm going to try and forget about all the pee comments, having made these otherwise loftily aquarian platitudes. Given that I am getting all touchy-feely, I need to go through the passenger list. Our favorite folks were a 50-something couple from the midwest: Sally, a special education teacher, and her art instructor husband. An outgoing father/son team from the bay area, Steve (age 25) was an education consultant and his dad (45-50) was a contractor. Cindi, a 40-something nursing administrator and former Army lieutenant from Tennessee, was a quietly positive, spiritual, and extremely secure single woman (she howled with laughter when I finally asked her if she was married or had ever been - her eventual reply: oh god no). Even with the DDG oarsmen in our midst, I most enjoyed sharing a boat with Cindi and Al, talking with these two independent people about history, nature, and philosophy. A Seattle lawyer brought his 3 twelve-year-old triplets (2 boys and 1 girl). Mom stayed at home because "she would never camp" (her kids' answer). Even though dad could be strict, he spent all day mothering those kids, dabbing on their sunscreen, reading to them, talking... Rounding out the passenger list was a 40-something couple with no kids from Sacramento. Being active and claiming an extensive list of paddling-oriented daytrips down California rivers, I know they were disappointed with the lack of whitewater.

At some point during the day, we stopped to visit an amphitheatre, the name of which I can't remember or locate. We pulled up to a foot-sucking muddy shore and hiked 5 minutes through a willow thicket. This dead-ended in an overhanging cirque of red sandstone, the slabby walls rising 100-200 feet high. After a moment of silence, Dano read Abbey's poetic descriptions of the Colorado plateau. Returning early (relative to most others) to the boats, I was taken aback to find half the oarsmen and a couple of passengers smoking (this was repeated throughout the trip). I mention it because it's something I have NEVER been around on any outdoor trip (personally, professionally, or guided). I am disgusted by smoking and I do not equate the habit with environmentalism or fitness. I did try to get over this because I liked the people, they tried to be discrete, and none of us could escape one another so we all had to find space for our weird habits. Within an hour of the cirque, we stopped for the night at what would be my favorite camp during the whole trip (everyone else liked camp 4). It was scenic, memorable, and the most comfortable in terms of a reasonable sleeping temperature. Compared with the Grand, EVERY camp along the upper Colorado had luxuriously sandy beaches that sloped into swimming or soaking bays along the wide and calm river. Of course, it was fucking blazing when we began setting up our tents. I - like most people - got into the river after finishing camp set-up. While many others played water football, I sat in the sandy water up to my neck talking with the final two guides (I hadn't really noticed them until camp, honestly). Bram (Like Bram Stoker, the Dracula author - I asked? Yes, he rolled his eyes) was the tall, dark, handsome 23-year old Allison developed a HUGE CRUSH ON. For me, though, Bram reminded me of my friend Bryce, this brotherly guy I worked with in graduate school. Bram also sang/played the most beautiful folk guitar and, while mind-bogglingly attractive, I have this negative thing about folk-guitar-playing crooners, having been seduced by one of their kind. Of course, svelte, blond, blue-eyed Brook (age 30), was - I SWEAR - the living embodiment of James, my

aforementioned folk-guitar-player. There are some people who just get inside you with their presence, their eyes, their expression. Brook had that way about him with me and it didn't help that I could look at his familiar terrain and feel like I'd been everywhere, on- and off-road. Yikes. But it was a yummy and mesmerizing yikes. A few other comments about camp one: I can't even begin to describe Jesse's bathroom presentation except to say that it was acted out and employed many expletives. The groover ticket was a broken red squirt gun and, needless to say, trotting off to the can with said gun was worthy of many jokes. The kitchen set-up and routine was standard. The first night's meal was grilled salmon, rice, asparagus, and cake/fruit for dessert. After a GLORIOUS sunset burn across the redwall, we all sat around in a big circle reading. Many folks, including myself, brought personal CD players - intent, in my case, on listening to DMB and Hiatt in the desert. Hearing "Crossing Muddy Waters" while watching the river and stars coming out was almost religious - despite the sadness of that track. Having played "It's Raining Men" many times during the LONG drive to Utah, I couldn't help but think: you can't rain men without winding up with muddy waters (that's either really deep or really superficial). By 10 p.m., the full moon had not emerged and I almost went to bed. But then, this MASSIVE light began to rise from a gap in the distance - eclipsing all starlight and holding us in breathless awe. I retired thereafter, preparing Allison's bed so she wouldn't disturb me when she finally decided to retire after swooning all over Bram in the moonlight. As I said before, that first night was the most comfortable in terms of temperature (dropping to 60°F). I slept fully and soundly.



Left to Right: hike to ruins, ruins, afternoon float - note bugs in the air and Oreo Doublestuff line of gypsum

River Day Two

As with all mornings, coffee call was at 7 a.m. Unlike Allison, I was awake and ready to pack at this time. Breakfast was exquisite: custard-filled French toast, sausages, and strawberries. Of all OARS trips I've done, this group of passengers was the most organized and fastest about packing. Allison and I rode with Brook, his only passengers. Looks aside, Brook fascinated me with his intellect and wandering spirit - sort of like Rick D. at an earlier and less certain stage of his life. Given that Allison and I were still absorbed in family discussions (with no interruption from the rowing man), it took a fair bit of time for Brook to enter our conversation. This seemed unusual because I was used to more forward and opinionated guides who interjected freely. I had the sense that Brook found Allison and I selfish in our closeness and over-the-top discussions. I also had the sense that Brook was insecure with regards to older passengers. Personally and professionally, I felt old and set in my ways compared to him and the 20-something guides. Compared with adult passengers, though, I was intermediate: single but careered and moneyed/mortgaged. Brook, though, seemed intent on putting me in the settled category, often providing defensive explanations as to why he did what he did (having come from an affluent family, an extensive liberal arts education) - as though I was judging him. I kept asking myself: am I, like, putting something out there that is making this guy insecure? Of course, Roger's going to write me back: take your pick, Sarah - the drool, spittle, oggling... all of the above? Clearly searching, Brook was someone who considered himself older and wiser, someone I had the sense wanted to be either a professor or a preacher, someone who went from grandly elevated to completely humble... probably because he actually listened to himself. I felt a strange connection with him because we shared powerful Air Force fathers and interesting ties to science and faith. And, yes, I was flabbergasted when we got into this discussion of Mormonism and I learned he was a former (but well-indoctrinated) Mormon. Despite my experiences with Salt Lake City (its strange juxtapositions of religion, affluence, pollution, and punk sub-culture), I had a tough time putting Mormonism and this well-tattooed ropey muscular blond into the same breath. After having Brook explain his views on Mormonism, I'm even more confused and perplexed by the religion. Most confounding were the self-analogies the Mormons take with respect to Jews: persecution (including genocide), establishing ownership of a sacred land, and justifying wealth, success, and affluence. Although I admire the work ethic and community of the Mormons, I'm not sure those ideas alone explain the wealth - particularly given the overt environmental destruction throughout Utah. Although we never touched the issue of polygamy, we did cover creationism and evolution. Surprisingly, Allison was silent this whole time (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT 2005 - Reading Krakauer's Under the Banner of Heaven, brought back memories of Brook; living near Krakauer's hometown, I greatly identified with his interest in researching and writing this fascinating book. I don't think Brook would have liked it, however).

Near Horsethief Canyon, we stopped for a theoretical hike to at an old cowboy camp. After bushwhacking tamarisk and climbing a butte, the guides realized they didn't really know the way. We weren't disappointed given the views over the river - the highest and most superlative we'd been afforded so far. After returning, I switched from a T-shirt to my bikini top (which I unknowingly put on upside-down). For the rest of the day, I sensed something was wrong because I was always on the verge of falling out. As we resumed floating, Brook informed us that, unless there were specific questions about the scenery, we were going to have quiet time. At the time, I mentally chuckled: that is, like, so patriarchal and/or meditative-hippie. I truly wondered how much I'd offended Brook - philosophically or in the too-personal category. Within an hour, Allison was rowing and Brook was gloriously stretched out reading aloud Tim Cahill essays penis gourds - as though he expected to shock/offend me (in fact, I had probably been bearing my breasts since lunch and he couldn't help himself). I didn't have the heart to say I'd heard all these essays before. Anyway - we did see one geological formation that justified a real question from the penis (I mean PEANUT) gallery: a HUGE band of white (right shot above) in the redwall. Brook's answer: petrified ice, elaborating

how there was a company back there mining it, the Oreo Doublestuff. Truthfully - gypsum. Shortly thereafter, we arrived in camp - a beautiful sandy beach. Given that my greasy hair was matting, I took a full-on but unsatisfying bath after setting up the tent. I regret not taking pictures of others walking across sections of the wide, shallow, and braided river. From my perspective, they looked as though they were, literally, walking on water - an interesting end to a day talking about spirituality. Given that this OARS crew was TOO into forced entertainment, the guides had warned us that, starting tonight, 2 people were going to be picked to sing and dance before food would be served. The picking was done by putting two clothes-pins (SING or DANCE) on unsuspecting victims. If you caught the pinner in the act, you could turn them down; if you found the pin before dinner, you could pass it on. Only the triplets were into this game. That night, I was sitting with my headphones when Allison passed me a note: Jesse pinned your hair. I pulled "SING" out of my hair and shook my head at him: NO. For the next 2 days, Jesse claimed Allison and I were cheaters and there existed tension between Jesse/Bram (game masterminds) and Allison/me. After the triplets sang AND danced, we enjoyed pork, rice, and applesauce. And then, for the first time, EVERYONE engaged in a deep and long conversation about science, religion, nature, and local history. The nearly-full moon was nowhere near coming up at 10:30 when I finally decided to retire.



Left to Right: heading up the gooseneck, view from the gooseneck gap, Jesse rowing

River Day Three

The next morning, the passengers were lethargic and the guides surmised we were dehydrated. After egg/cheese/sausage sandwiches, we were goaded into drinking a ton. I downed 32 oz. in 32 seconds, shocking a few people who assumed this was a well-practiced bar trick. For the next 40 minutes, I felt like I was going to puke. Banished cheaters, Allison and I took the ducky. Even so, we followed Jesse, Allison singing "Rise and Shine" at the top of her lungs. Although he seemed more agreeable, I now feared he assumed we were happy christians. We hiked to several granaries that morning (overall, we saw more ruins per mile on this trip than we did on the Grand). After the hike, Allison was pooped out and decided she needed to ride with Bram (his only passenger of the day). Still full of energy, I paddled the ducky on my own - peacefully until the upriver winds picked up after lunch and I almost bit it. I started in the middle of the flotilla but wound up trailing Brook's last boat. There were times when I was held in a complete standstill or moving backwards - when I freaked because the river grew so wide and choppy. In the distance, I saw the boats pulling up to shore and so I pushed myself hard. This would be our final hike of the day - one that, unfortunately, I could not enjoy because I came off the ducky winded, anxious, and thirsty (everyone else was rested and ready to go, no concept of what I'd been through). While Bram lead passengers over this narrow peninsula (1 steep mile up and then down), the rafts floated the 4-mile gooseneck. I was out of breath at every rest stop during the 500-foot, 108°F climb. Bram, who thought I was gonna pass out, puke, or die, mothered me all the way. While I physically registered the fantastic views, I was too fucked in the head to enjoy them. The way down was edgy, cliffy, and gave me full-on vertigo. At the worst spot, Bram decided to give this mostly accurate lecture about microbiotic soil. Afterwards, a class 2 scramble lead down this chute of loose rocks that didn't please everyone - but we made it.

Given the boats were 20 minutes behind, we got in the water to cool off. From this point, we rowed against the wind another hour. Tonight's camp was the guides' favorite (but not the passengers'). The boats pulled up to this small sandy beach surrounded by ledges. The kitchen was set up on the beach and passengers hauled gear up to the ledges, camping ON the "baking stone." After suffering in this tiny spot of tamarisk-provided shade, we headed into the water up to our necks, drinking beer and peeing. The under-30 crowd took to climbing some ledges and diving into a deep hole in the river (a few crazy old folks - myself excluded - jumped after watching the kids). Dinner featured a mole-spiced beef that could be built into burritos, with grilled onions/peppers, beans, and guacamole. The triplets clothes-pinned Allison and I and so we did a duo-rendition of "I'm a Little Teapot." While Jesse thanked us for being good sports, Bram was disappointed in our choice of material. Like I said: I DO NOT SING OR DANCE. After dinner, Bram invited everyone up to this amphitheatre for a "real" show (no jabs there). The supposedly short walk up there, though, took most people by surprise. We bushwhacked heavy brush 5 minutes and then entered a clearing beneath overhanging stone. Problematically, only 3 people brought headlamps and Bram was intent on singing WAY past even the dark phase of twilight. Hearing and watching Bram play was awesome, his folky-bluesy voice resonating against the sandstone, floating like smoke into the starry night. At some point, he broke a string and repaired it on the spot, turning on his headlamp. As he was finishing, he casually commented: hey, there's a little rattlesnake. EVERYONE freaked as there was, indeed, a little rattlesnake scurrying from under the slab on which Bram was sitting. Several us decided to leave before more creatures emerged. I went back with the first crowd, stargazing on the beach until Allison came down. Indeed, it speaks volumes that snake-phobe Allison still hung out listening to EVERY NOTE of Bram's performance. After Allison and I thoroughly assessed under and around the tent for snakes, we climbed into the tent and tried to sleep. Unable to given the heat (still 85°F), we sat outside another hour talking about men, audibly farting (snickering every time), and watching the magnificent stars. Shortly after sitting down, we were visited by this cute walking stick bug. We set it

on the beam of my headlamp and it remained with us almost an hour - putting up with all sorts of antics (the funniest involved us dueling with it using a piece of grass - it stood on its back two legs and fought proudly). Eventually, we returned to the tent where I resorted to hanging my Camelback from the ceiling and wetting myself throughout the night.

River Day Four

The next morning, I enjoyed two blueberry pancakes and a WHOLE MESS of bacon. Day 4 would be a major transition (at least on paper) because we would be passing the Confluence of the Colorado and Green, at which point we would enter Cataract Canyon (albeit not to the famous Big Drops section). Allison and I set out in the ducky and rode as such to just before the Confluence. Early in the day, we hiked briefly up Indian Creek to some impressive ruins. Adjacent to this trailhead was our first bona fide riffle (amusing, Allison was all freaked out until she went through it). After this point, I decided to ride with Jesse, Cindi and Sally. Allison paddled by herself for a spell but then, as would be repeated throughout the remainder of the trip, she wound up on Bram's boat looking lethargic and dreamy.



Left to Right: Doll's House (on the rim), Confluence (looking up Green), Indian Creek ruins

Honestly, before vs. after the Confluence didn't look or feel any different. Shortly after this merging, we pulled up to this sandbar and were required, for the first time, to don life jackets on board the rafts. Contrary to predictions, the guides were still rowing - and now the ferocious afternoon winds were picking up. Dano seemed especially crushed by this. Watching Brook, rowing in front of us, was torture because he was such a small and spindly guy and you could just see how both determined and spent he was. Shortly after the Confluence, we also passed by the Doll House - impressive rock formations that are part of the Canyonlands Maze District (to me, they looked more like typical structures in the Needles District). Based on OARS brochures, I had been looking forward to hiking up to this formation via a steep (1500 feet in 1 mile) and rough trail. At the pre-trip meeting, though, Dano said OARS doesn't take parties up there during the hottest parts of the summer because of heatstroke. While I understood this rationale (it was currently over 100° F), I was disappointed. Dano and I firmly agreed that OARS needs to change its brochures. In total, we rafted about 5 rapids that day. Only the one right before camp impressed us, folding the boat to the point that both Cindi and I lost our holds and sustained wicked bruises after hitting the metal frame. Our camp for the night (either Rapid 5 or Brown Betty - I can't be sure) was along a pretty sandy beach that was adjacent to a long wave-train: a 7-backed serpent of water, the troughs of which were 4-6 feet high and deep. I enjoyed the camp for several reasons: its groover offered amazing views downriver and featured a mesmerizing sacred datura bush; the marinated chicken and salsa-mashed potatoes were awesome; watching folks run or swim the rapid (more to follow); and the evening conversation (also more to follow). A few things were not memorable, however: terrific GI distress and a cloud-like mass of tiny dragonflies that descended on us after twilight (we found hundreds of their ghost-like shells stuck to our tents the next day). Upon carrying our gear to a campsite, Allison and I ran for the river - avoiding tent erection. Our delay turned out to be wise when a mild sandstorm whipped up (the sand was so fine that it blew through the mosquito netting doors of others' tents). Most folks (me excluded) then took turns hauling the ducky upstream and running the serpent-backed rapid - doing this over and over again, two at a time. Allison ran second with Steve; things were fine until they hit the biggest wave/hole in the complex. It seemed to those of us watching that Allison stopped rowing as they crested. That's about when Steve's end of the boat started filling with water - which caused him to come out. Allison didn't know she lost Steve and kept right on going, eventually realizing she had to self-rescue. Steve, meanwhile, floated the rapid without a hitch - only to get stung by a bee upon getting out of the water. After Steve's swim, Brook goaded folks to swim the rapid, leading everyone but Sally, Cindi, Seattle family, and I through the waves. Brook's rationale: everyone who does a river trip should understand what it feels like to be in a rapid (and this was a perfectly safe place to jump in). Nevertheless, something in my gut (likely gas) said: don't do it, it'll scare you too much. Watching folks bob down the rapid was life-altering in a way I cannot adequately describe after the fact. You saw these little bodies in this big train of whitewater. They floated halfway up each wave but then vanished into the mass of water - their faces emerging again with amazing expressions of breathless drowning and awe. I wish I could have photographed the faces. I can't say it scared me outright; it was just stirring.

Before dinner, Sally and Allison and I sat high up on the beach having a major girl-talk. Sally initiated it by shouldering up to me: boy if I was single, I would have a tough time with all these gorgeous, intelligent, interesting single male guides. I laughed: after enough experience, there are three male types I won't touch: musicians, climbers, and oarsmen. And, don't get me wrong - all are totally attractive, well-educated, and liberal in worldly and interesting ways. They all have fascinating lives and are fun to watch, but none of that is fun to date (don't expect companionship, much less commitment). These kinds of men all share a common level of self-absorption that, in combination with my similar self-absorption, never works. Sally agreed but then just smiled deliciously (with this memorably lip-smacking grin): you have to agree, though, they make awfully good mind-candy. Allison and I howled in agreement. I explained that over the years I have learned that half of a rafting trip is

about interacting with the guides. Every team of oarsmen I've worked with (private or professional) has been unique and interesting beyond words. A good rafting trip is like a big fling (like a vacation should be) where no one catches any STDs or gets broken-hearted. We then assigned specific kinds of sweets to all the men: Bram was black licorice; Jessi was some kind of salted nut roll; Dano was a Tootsie-Pop; and I gave Brook the Godiva Belgian dark chocolate ice cream award. Ponderingly, we all exhaled - Mmmhhmmmmmm. By the time the guides called DINNER, we were beside ourselves with breathless laughter. Notably, the guides didn't sit near us (they were probably afraid). Poor things - having to put up with a bunch of lascivious gals with an age-span of 18-50+. After dinner, Sally and I compared outdoor adventure lists (both things we'd done and things we wanted to do) before enjoying an extensive conversation about education. As we were winding down, Dano and Brook joined the passenger circle, books in hand. They read and discussed poems and regional stories (all of which I'd heard in the Grand Canyon). I can't say I was bored - given the dizzying array of constellations - but I wasn't listening. Allison later remarked that she was surprised how separate the guides were in camp. As a counselor, she felt it was important to eat with the peons (my words, not hers) - but these guides seemed more into hanging in their guy circle, drinking and shooting the shit during and after dinner. Most other professional guides I've traveled with spent more time in the dinner circle. Among this crew, Dano and Brook attempted to be the most interactive, engaging, and conversational. Yawning, I pooped out and went to bed early. I was told later that a neighboring group's guide, a large Native American man with a long gray ponytail, came over to socialize with our party. He was said to have taken such a shine to Allison that Steve had to feign being her husband to protect her from his advances. Allison, like me, must have inherited the "wanker magnet" gene.



Left to Right: Big Drops (NOT), scouting the biggest rapid (NOT), Sally leads the Four Oarsmen of the Apocalypse

River Day Five

The next day saw all final rapids, including the Big Drops. Sadly, the largest rapids that ever existed on the Colorado remain buried in Lake Powell. Afterwards, we were to meet up with another OARS group with our motor, lash boats together, and speed to our last camp. It was planned we would arrive around 3, permitting a 3-5 mile hike up spectacular Dark Canyon. Unfortunately, many things about this day were disappointing. I rafted with Dano, Cindi, and Sally while Allison paddled the ducky before climbing into Bram's boat. Dano seemed less tense and more reticent about the pathetic water level. Here we were, after all, in Cataract Canyon - AND WE WERE STILL ROWING. The normally high waterline was visible 10-12 feet higher on the rocks. It was hard to imagine so much water swelling through this space. Dano said the highest he'd ever run Cataract was at 78,000 cfs - boats vanishing into 20-30 foot holes. He explained how, at that level, you could not control the boats much and there were many trips where he just held his breath and puckered. When we arrived at the Big Drops, we scouted numbers 21 and 23 (MAYBE class 3). Illustrating the lack of danger, Dano permitted the Sacramento couple to ducky all the Big Drops. My serious advice for folks who want big Cataract water: don't book until the last minute, when you know the snow pack and river volume. The dragging fill-back-point of Lake Powell was met immediately following the last of the Big Drops, requiring the need to ROW AGAIN. We continued to our motor-pick-up site and lunched on cold black bean wraps. Alas, the meeting time passed with no sign of the other group. Concerns were great because a Life Fleet helicopter had been seen earlier, flying up-canyon. Dano, however, could not get satellite-phone reception. In the end, it was 2 hours before the group arrived, no excuse for their being late. We knew the implications: no Dark Canyon (this after other key hiking trips had been eliminated). The motor set-up proceeded quickly and, for a few moments, I wondered if we could still pull off the hike. Within 30 minutes of setting out, though, it was clear there were MAJOR sandbars. We grounded 4 times to the point that we all had to disembark and walk the rafts through the muck. I knew I HATED Lake Powell before this trip; it is hard to describe how much I HATE it now, having seen its impact. I understand why Abbey wrote angry eco-terrorist books about this area.

We arrived at camp around 5, the only saving grace being that we were now in the shade. Across the way: Allison's suitor and his party. Back in Moab, we had been warned to dress up for some kind of event during our final dinner. In honor of Georgie White, I donned my pimp-daddy sarong and stuffed my top with socks. Georgie, one of the first women to row the Colorado (AND the first woman to own a guiding company), was buxom and served cocktails to her guests in a leopard-skin body leotard. Of course, I never got to explain this so lord knows what everyone thought of me feigning big boobs. While the guides were cooking dinner, Sally lead a covert passenger meeting: time to make the guides sing and dance. At some point, the guides changed into their formal wear: Bram donned into a blindingly white ladies slip. Dano scared us all by replacing his pants with his small life vest (knife prominently placed in the obvious location). Brook gyrated about in Chip 'N Dales regalia that left nothing to the imagination. And Jessi emerged from his boat as "Clevis" (Cletus meets Elvis). Despite complete hysterics all around, Sally revealed the clothespins, insisting the guides help her. Upon forming a weird chorus line, she lead a swaying dance - to which we clapped the beat - that increased in complexity (most guides improvised Sally's simple dance into something saucy). And then Sally improvised the name-game song with reference to each oarsmen. By the end, folks across the river were audibly howling, whooping, and catcalling. And with that, dinner was served: curried chicken with a yogurt-banana sauce. Unfortunately, we had swallowed so much air while laughing that we were full after one helping. After dinner, the guides reverted to normal attire and we all sat down to a discussion of environmentalism and Lake Powell. Most guides

favored draining the lake, believing it was already necessary because silt was accumulating to the point that water was not flowing properly to the dam. I asked if OARS, as a company, supported draining Powell but was told that they did not. In fact, many Grand Canyon oarsmen were said to prefer it controlled because the rapids were safer. Most passengers felt that the dam(n) would ultimately fail and the effects of such a burst without warning justified draining. We could not agree whether the economics of the dam justified keeping it. The latter topic led to a broader discussion of American values, corporate greed, and the current state of how "we" are perceived in the world. One of the more interesting debates was whether indigenous people in third world countries were inherently better at saving the environment than so-called developed civilizations. One group believed the former had a closer relationship with the land and understood when resources were running low. Many of us - including myself - insisted this was not the case because we'd seen third world environmental destruction. External pressures (e.g. disease, famine) served to brake the population - not social choice. The problem with "us" is that we have created enough technology to temporarily over-ride carrying capacity (until things like germs evolve to get us back). After tiring of the crossfire, we enjoyed another performance by Bram. One of his songs was interrupted by a shooting star that spanned the length of the sky, its tail retaining brightness the entire way across. In between it all, Brook mused about being an oarsmen, prefacing it with: "many folks wonder when I'm going to grow up and give up this carefree lifestyle..." While I appreciated his sentiment, I looked around the crowd and thought: you know, most people here feel that way and intermingle their work with comparably enlightening and peaceful activities. But I held my tongue because I felt that Brook, underneath that secure exterior, was someone still vulnerably navigating the waters. The night was cool and deep sleep came profoundly.



Left to Right: Allison emerges from Powell mud, Brooke baptizes the muddy, Allison clearly still muddy after baptism

River Day Six

The next day, we spent 3 hours motoring to Lake Powell, our goal repeatedly derailed by sandbars. Even so, getting into the water was good because temperatures exceeded 110°F. While Allison remained near Bram, I was in my own world listening to John Hiatt - mostly to escape the annoying motor. Hite Bridge came into view around 11 a.m. As we floated under it, the guides fashioned a large slingshot with which they attempted (unsuccessfully) to hit onlookers with uneaten eggs. Minutes later, we pulled into the shade of this large wall to eat pitas filled with grilled chicken salad and mango chutney. Claiming Lake Powell silt/mud as the best, Jesse dove headfirst into the murky lake, emerging like the creature from the black lagoon. Everyone under 30 partook in the "anti-baptism" (as I like to call it). The microbiologist in me said NO WAY. After diving in, Allison described the lake as having 3 feet of water and then sticky mud farther than she could feel. Memorably, Steve jumped in feet-first: "oh my god - you go in and you just stick." Jesse's reply, likely heard by just Steve and I: "like a good woman." I only glared (like I said before - NOT dating material). The clay-like mud was so thick that getting clean proved challenging. Eventually, Brook hauled each person partway out of the water while another guide water-gunned him/her off. Incidentally, one thing I learned on this trip: how difficult it is to get back into a raft from the water. Within 15 minutes of cleaning up, we arrived at Hite Marina. Lake Powell was eerie and ugly: a beautiful former canyon, flooded so assholes with speedboats and houseboats can float around what used to be pristine towers and arches. Despite the guides' preoccupation with getting ready for the next trip (in 1.5 days), Dano said he'd do his best to make dinner at 7. In our efforts to keep out of the way, we rushed gear and ourselves to the van, driving a quarter mile before we realized that we had an hour to kill and, at the very least, should go back and take the obligatory team picture. The surprised looks from the guides when the van rolled back was memorable. The drive to the single paved airstrip was 15 minutes away, notably over the Hite Bridge. There, 3 small 4-6 seater planes waited. I had not been in such a small plane since I was 11 - well before I developed my on-and-off fear of flying. The head pilot greeted us, informing us they were ready any time. The runway sloped down a hill, at the bottom of which was the tapered end of Lake Powell and a big cliff. Needless to say, planes lurched 180° following take-off for the return to Moab. The head pilot herded asked if there were any folks who HAD to sit together. No one stepped forward so he sorted us by weight - which did NOT help my nerves. With Seattle dad and 2 boys, I was in the last plane that took off. Our pilot, Levar, was in his early 70's; I would be lying if I said I wasn't concerned (fortunately, Seattle dad had flying experience). With the boys in back, I sat directly behind Levar. Seattle dad's copilot seat had its own steering control that went up and down as the pilot maneuvered. I would have shit if I had been assigned that seat. Levar started up the deafening plane. After watching all the other planes smoothly take off, we proceeded likewise. In the air, the winds were evident, jostling the plane the whole ride back. I was fine the first few minutes because it really was spectacular. Peering straight down made me dizzy (more in the passing-out sense) and I had to close my eyes and think happy thoughts. One of the boys was animated but the other almost threw up. Prior to take-off, Levar said about 1/20 people freaked out or threw up on this flight. Fortunately, no one in our party went haywire (but we did represent less than 20).

At one point, the animated boy spied river rapids and, of course, the pilot tilted the plane 45° for a straight-down view into the Colorado. It was like being in a fucking glass-bottomed boat and I nearly lost it. Watching the other planes, I couldn't imagine

these tiny things holding all these dear people (and how we must look the same). One plane descended to 100 feet above the canyon rim (we were 500 feet above the rim at all times). And then I saw the most remarkable thing: the Maze. The surface was a zebra stripe of tan and red-brown sandstone, sliced in all directions by fractal run-offs. The Maze went on for miles and miles. I often eschew people who take aerial tours - not only for impact reasons but also because I think they are trying to avoid walking. But, seriously, nothing on the ground will ever capture that view. Not to diminish the rafting trip, but THAT plane ride was worth the entire price of the float trip. In the distance, I saw Grandview Point (the southernmost tip of Island in the Sky). JUST as we flew above this mass of land, we hit a wall of wind and the plane dropped 30+ feet. Everyone screamed and grabbed for fixed objects. The pilot half-chuckled and said he needed to pay more attention. The flight between Island and the Moab Airport was longer than I expected - although our plane, ironically, was the first to land (everyone else was out hot-dogging in the canyons). We were escorted to the welcome, air-conditioned terminal. Within 5 minutes, everyone was on the ground and, after piling into an old school bus, were on the road to Moab.



Left to Right: pulling into the take-out, Steve and dad on the runway, over the Colorado/Canyonlands

Back in Moab, Allison and I climbed into my oven-like car and headed to the ice cream parlor for double dark chocolate. After a grocery store run for cleansing products, we returned to the hotel, laundering and bathing for 2 hours. Donning WAY too short hippie dresses (albeit with bronzed legs), Allison and I visited Moab's rock and fossil shop where we flirted with the geologist and bought necklaces, before meeting up with the team at the OARS office. All the passengers looked disturbingly clean in a bizarre and unfamiliar way. After making the 4-hour drive from Hite, the guides looked hot, haggard, and dirty. Allison handed Sally Tootsie-Pops and we all howled knowingly. In general, the passengers seemed more connected and enthusiastic than the guides. Given that it was 7, we headed to a recommended nouveau Mexican restaurant (the guides promised they'd make it after a quick clean-up). At the time, I wondered if we'd see any of them. The passengers were gregarious, smiling ear-to-ear, and joyous. Sally's husband made us go around the table and describe our fondest trip moments. My responses: Sally's song and dance, the BIG shooting star, and being IN the river and why. Before Allison could answer, I made her blush (and the table knowingly smile) by air-guitaring an impression of Bram and fluttering my eyes. As the annoying big sister, I teasingly whispered to Allison about what she was going to do when we all HUGGED goodbye and she slugged me under the table. Of course I should talk: Brook showed up clean-shaven, looking way too much like my former little blond man. As dinner conversation wound down, we formed a circle and began a random hugging ceremony - initiated by Dano bear-hugging me (I didn't think I made that positive an impression). Steve's dad was a kisser and, being from stoic Norwegian stock, I am always taken aback by casual kissers. Allison and I were getting down to the young guides and I eyeballed Allison as I smiled at Bram (no doubt a few stars in MY eyes) and said: "well, I apologize for not riding in your boat - I hope you didn't take it personally." He smiled girlishly and gave me a big hug - before moving to Allison who seemed stiff as a board. And then it was just Brook - who eyed me in a way I can only liken to James' always-uncertain expressions. He smiled lightly: Sarah, Sarah (same tone of voice, too - sent shivers down my spine). We embraced warmly, although he felt unbearably wiry and small (just like James did, especially in the end). And in that moment, I felt overwhelmingly large. Bram, Brook, Steve, Allison, and I headed out from the restaurant together. The guys tried to get us to go dancing with them (Allison wanted, more than anything, to join them). In a motherly way, I smiled and turned them down for both of us because we had to be on the road at the crack of dawn. I couldn't help but watch Brook walk away, feeling a little mesmerized. There is a song called "Ghost" by the Indigo Girls and that is how I felt: occupied all week with James' ghost (well, the Moabite, pseudo-Mormon version of his ghost). Someday, he'll read that and get shivers down his spine - not only because I freely admit it but also because I cite that song. Indeed: the Colorado's mighty too... it starts at a place where you could walk across with five steps down... I guess that's how he started... but at this point, he rushed right through me and I start to drown. In reality - or consequently - I packed up and we left for Yellowstone.