

# Grand Canyon rafting trip part II

*Jun 2-12, 2010*



*Rafting the Colorado*

## Introduction

I'll never forget the day about 2 years ago when we finished our rafting trip down the upper part of the Grand Canyon. We started in Lee's Ferry and over 6 days rafted to Pipe Springs - about where the Bright Angel trail reaches the Colorado River. On a rather cool and cloudy morning in May after a wonderful 6 days on the river, we started a solemn pilgrimage up the 9 mile hike up the Bright Angel trail, wondering someday if and when we would be back.

Back at John Keen's apartment after the trip 2 years ago, we both decided that we were going back. I knew I probably couldn't make it the next year, and John had plans already, but we vowed we'd be back in 2 years. Well, 2 years later here we were!

## Jun 2

We were eagerly anticipating a wonderful trip back to the Grand Canyon as June rolled around - the rafting company Outdoors Unlimited had mailed us some information about what to bring and how to prepare. We got another copy of the Belknap guide to the river, showing the rapids and hikes around the canyon (even though we didn't really need the book again since the river hadn't changed much in 2 years!)

I felt a little unprepared meeting at John's apartment with just a backpack - I would be spending the next 10 days with just a few changes of clothes, some basic toiletries and 2 cameras (with backup memory cards and batteries). After a short walk to the VTA station from John's place, we hopped on the light rail and a bus to the SJC airport. We enjoyed watching the Sharks actually winning in one of the NHL playoff games as we were having dinner before the flight. It was a short and uneventful flight to Las Vegas (gotta love Southwest), and soon we were on the shuttle to Treasure Island where we spent the first night.

Watching the volcano at the Mirage and the siren's pirate show outside our hotel at TI, I knew it would be like a night & day difference heading out to one of the greatest natural wonders the next day (from one of the most garish man-made wonders of the lights and crazy entertainment in Vegas to the serenity of the Grand Canyon!)

## Jun 3

The room was a bit more expensive than we probably needed (and you got to love the mandatory "entertainment tax" surcharge they slapped on the room - guess something has to pay for the pirate show!), but the bed was comfortable and we actually slept pretty well in anticipation of the next week.

I was looking forward to the flight to the Grand Canyon - actually staying at TI ended up being quite convenient, since the shuttle left right from our hotel. We took a ride to the northern airport in Las Vegas about 20 minutes out of town. We boarded a small plane, mostly filled with an "Asian invasion" of tourists who would be spending probably just the afternoon at the canyon, then flying back to Vegas where they could enjoy the nighttime entertainment again! But we'd be staying for many days and enjoying a different sort of nighttime entertainment - watching the stars at night over the gentle rush of water from the Colorado River.

Our small Vision Airlines plane bounced around a bit as we climbed out of the steamy city - it was probably over 100 degrees already, but in the distance, snow-capped Mt Charleston was visible above the hazy layer. We flew right over the Hoover Dam and Lake Mead and saw the progress on the highway 93 bridge spanning Boulder Canyon just downstream from the dam. An accident a few years ago from high winds damaging one of the cranes set the project back 2 years (so the bridge should have been done already!) It will be nice once that motorway is completed to alleviate traffic waiting to cross the dam, even though so much effort to "tame

nature" had to be put forth to allow a straight freeway to navigate the curving slopes of the canyons.



*Lake Mead and Hoover Dam*

The lake was still down considerably after many dry years and continued over-use of water by southern CA. In fact I've heard some old ruins that had been covered by water for many years had started to become exposed once again. I wonder how much more the lake is going to dry up - they said if the water goes too low (it's around 39 percent now), one of the main intakes to bring water into Vegas will be dry, causing major water problems for the desert city. It's as if another one of our efforts to "tame nature" has failed - lush golf courses and fountains and overpopulation were probably not meant to happen in the desert!

We flew right over the lower part of the canyon, even getting to see Grand Canyon West where the skywalk and Eagle point are. I was there with some friends a few years ago - taking a day trip from their house just outside Vegas. It was a bit of an over-charged tourist trap, but still beautiful and a wondrous sight. Seeing the place from the air brought a whole new perspective and I was able to instantly recognize the places we had been.

As we started to descend we made a right turn toward the Grand Canyon airport - the snow-capped San Francisco peaks were visible on the horizon - almost looked close enough to touch even though they were many miles away, near Flagstaff. My ears hardly popped at all when we landed - since we had gone from around 1000 feet to near 7000 where we landed.

The rest of the passengers split off with their tour group, leaving just John and I behind at the airport, where we caught our bus to the Grand Canyon national park itself. We found a nice viewpoint near Yavapai point to enjoy our lunches (they actually gave us free box lunches on the flight!) Even though I had been to the canyon probably 4 or 5 times now, it never ceased to amaze me the wonder of seeing one of the most amazing works of God's creation. The

enormity of the scale, so many layers of geologic history, and the raw beauty of untamed nature has inspired the imagination of millions of people.

It was nice to have the afternoon to wander around the rim, exploring the various viewpoints along the way. I'm sure I probably took many of the exact same pictures as on the previous trip, but I couldn't help myself! We walked through a "path of time" passing markers every so often with a date and some rocks representative of that time period. I recalled some of what I had learned from the previous trip - "Know the Canyon history" (KTCH = Kaibab, Toroweap, Coconino, Hermit). Walking the path helped jog the memory once again. I've always been a bit agnostic about if these rocks are really 780 million years old and did the canyon get formed over millions of years, but I think regardless of the actual time frame that there was the unmistakable hand of God creating the whole thing. He could have chosen to create it catastrophically very quickly, like during the Biblical flood, or over millions of years, but I would have a very hard time believing that it happened by chance.



*John and I on the rim*

A plaque greeted us by the Bright Angel Lodge with a verse from Scripture -

*O Lord, how manifold are Thy works!  
In wisdom hast thou made them all:  
The earth is ful of Thy riches - Psalm 104:24*

A few wispy clouds turned a wispy pink as we watched the sunset over the rim of the canyon as we made the short walk to the Maswik Lodge where we were going to spend the night. Some deer greeted us along the way - it had already felt like a wonderful trip, and we hadn't even started yet!

I knew the group was going to all be meeting at the lodge, and as we were having dinner, I looked around to see if maybe some rafters were seated around us. After dinner, I saw a group seated in one of the couches and one guy was wearing a shirt from another adventure trip he had been on. I suspected he might be in our group, and it turned out he and his wife and 3 kids were all with us. We had come all this way and spent the first day and a half on our own, and it was nice to have the assurance that the others were here too.

Shortly afterward, we had a brief orientation by the cafeteria. The anticipation was visible on our faces as we reviewed some of the details about the rafting and when and where we would be meeting for the hike the next morning. A couple people were missing - turns out they were starting from the north rim of the canyon, hiking down on their own, staying at Phantom Ranch, avoiding many of the tourist crowds, and meeting us at the rafts the next day. And 4 people were already there since they were continuing on from the upper trip. Last time, there had been a full exchange (everybody was doing just either the upper or lower trip, but this time, those 4 people were doing the full trip and the rest of the group was doing the exchange).

Flipping through one of the books in the "rafting library", I anticipated the hikes to some wonderful places like "Elves Chasm", "Travertine Grotto", and the "Deer Creek Tapeatz Narrows". I knew many of our pull-out spots were contingent on availability (some spots can get crowded easily, and we would have to switch to Plan B or C or even D - this river trip would be a bit of an expedition with many unpredictable elements). I had to be cautiously optimistic and couldn't anticipate any particular place, but I knew there were so many wonders to behold that much fun was going to be had, regardless!

I made sure all my batteries were charged full since this would be our last electricity for a while - it would be a bummer to run out of batteries with 3 days still to go, and with more cameras taking specialized lithium batteries these days, it is no longer easy to just bring a rack of spare AA batteries along.

## Jun 4 (day 1)

We had 2 separate alarms that beeped within about a minute of each other - we didn't want to be late and miss the start of our trip! After our last hot shower for many days and a quick continental breakfast at the lodge, we checked out and hit the Bright Angel trail just down the street.

The golden light of sunrise was hitting the canyon walls as we started weaving our way down the sinuous trail through the first few layers of the expansive void below us. Thankfully the guides had provided trekking poles to help protect our knees as they were going to be taking a beating for the next 9 miles or so. The trail was familiar - we had gone up it at the end of our trip 2 years ago, and here we were going back down for part II of our river adventure.

The familiar sights - the red painted pictographs of the bighorn sheep near the top, the tunnel, and the winding switchbacks leading deeper into the chasm, the blooming trees and cacti at

Indian Gardens - welcomed us back. We met with Cygnet and some of her family on the way down - she was going to be paddling with us the whole way.

It was getting hot already - I'm really glad we didn't have to be hiking back up in the heat! I found a couple old abandoned mining tunnels that I used to cool off (it was probably 30 degrees cooler inside!) - and it was an excuse to break up the hike a bit and explore... We followed a mule train for a while down the canyon - I wondered if I was going to pick up a lucky horseshoe again (in Yosemite the previous year on a backpacking trip, we moved aside to let a train pass, and shortly after they passed, I got to pick up a shiny new horseshoe one of the animals had just dropped) - but no such luck here - oh well.



*Hiking the Bright Angel trail toward Indian Gardens*

Stopping at Indian Gardens, we met the group that was hiking back up the canyon from the upper trip. We had done the same thing 2 years ago when we were hiking out and I wished we could be hiking back down to do the rest of the river! Now we were in their shoes and hiking back in. I wonder how many of the folks hiking out this time would come back next year or the year after to finish the river. We chatted a little and I enjoyed my bagel and rest of our breakfast I had packed for on the trail.

Around one of the final bends of the trail, we got close to Pipe Creek - the first running water for a while. Stopping to soak and cool off in the water was a good way to beat the heat! I hadn't been able to see the river for pretty much the entire hike (the steep-walled inner granite gorge blocks the view in most places), and it was a wondrous sight to finally see the glimmer of the yellow rafts and some blue tents a ways ahead.

Yay - they were just setting up lunch by the river. I was pretty hungry after the long hike and only had a swig of water left after the hot trip down. It was nice to finally meet the rest of the group and finally all be together. The sandwiches, sodas and cookies were like heaven as I started gearing up for the next 9 days on the river.

Our group was finally complete -

Ben, Phil, Bert and Carrie our guides

Heather and Sarah on the gear boats

Johnna, John, Kristen and Itai who were continuing on from the upper trip

Will & Marcia and kids Alex, Rachel and Mark, the family from Ohio

Cygnnet & Roger and kids Keith, Claire and Michael, the family from Arkansas

Jim and Matt who had met us after hiking down from the north rim

John and me from CA

After a short briefing and picking up our life jackets (we all had rafting experience so the safety briefing was pretty short), we hit the rafts. Carrie was guiding the paddle raft with 6 of us (Jim & Matt, Cygnnet & Keith, John & me). It was cool seeing Carrie again - she had been one of the guides on our previous trip. And Ben was there too - guiding one of the oar boats this time. It was fun to reminisce of old memories from our previous trip.



*Lunch at Pipe Creek beach at our put-in*

We had barely gotten in the water and we already had a rapid to deal with. It was a small one, but still enough to get us a crash course on paddling. All the rocks and debris that flow down Pipe Creek canyon (the one we hiked in on) created the rapid - in fact almost all the side canyons of the Colorado are followed by rapids - the deeper and steeper the canyon, generally the bigger the rapid as larger rocks would have tumbled into the river.

Just a few miles further were the Hermit and Horn Creek rapid - some of the largest rapids on the whole trip. We got thrashed around a bit and pretty wet, but managed to pass them

unscathed - whew! It was probably about 100 degrees out but the cool water was a welcome relief! Since the water is released at the bottom of the dam at Glen Canyon, it is pretty cold (about 45 degrees), and roughly for every 20 miles down the river it warms 1 degree. So by now (about 100 miles down the river), it had warmed to a nice 50 degrees.

I enjoyed Carrie's pink cowboy hat and hearing some of her stories about her rock climbing and her bar in Flagstaff where she works when she's not on the river. She was going to be helping with dinner tonight - prepping tuna steaks and fruit salad - I had remembered the gourmet meals on our previous trip, and I knew I was not going to be disappointed on this trip either!

Our first camp was at Crystal canyon - a fairly significant side canyon on the north side of the river. We had a nice sandy beach right by the river and as soon as we parked, we had a nice baggage line going. I remember from our previous trip how we had gotten so efficient at passing the supplies and our bags (we each had one yellow bag for our clothes and blue bag for our sleeping gear - sleeping bag, sheet & tarp). The guides had the "kitchen" set up in just a couple minutes and the propane tank and stove was running to start cooking dinner.

Meanwhile, we staked out our claims - there were plenty of sandy spots to lay our tarps and pads and sleeping bags. We would just sleep under the stars - there were no bugs to speak of, and I couldn't imagine any chance of rain in the desert (and June is historically the driest month anyway).

We had the next 45 minutes or so on our own just to relax and hang out and explore a bit. Ben, one of our guides had said there was a waterfall a little ways up the canyon but it had been a while since he had been there. I saw the creek that flowed down Crystal canyon and followed it upstream a little. Following some footprints along the sandy and pebbly creek bed, I enjoyed the solitude of the canyon and the serenity of the majestic nature all around. I kept my eyes out for bighorn sheep or deer, but all was quiet. A lizard would flit around on the rocks every so often and I spotted a chuckwalla doing "push-ups" - I was intrigued why these big lizards felt they needed more exercise on a hot evening. But maybe it is some sort of mating call. I tried to get a picture but when I moved he quickly slithered away - oh well.

About 15 minutes up the canyon, I was ready to turn back when I heard rushing water around the next corner - there was the waterfall. Although not real high and impressive, it was a nice spot to relax and take a natural shower. The river water was too cold to really bathe in much, but the waterfall was warm and soothing. I lay in the water for about 5 minutes to wash away the sweat and grime of the day.

Back at camp, I saw we were out on a massive debris fan. Ben was hanging out, enjoying cigars with Keith and we got to swap stories a bit. He was glad I found the falls. Ben, knowing a bit of geology gave us some interesting natural history - in 1966, an enormous landslide had created an avalanche of mud, rocks and debris that was probably at least 50 feet thick. This flow temporarily dammed the river, causing widespread floods downstream. Once the dam broke, the flow was so dangerous and unpredictable that the stretch could not be run safely by many people (they would have to portage and walk around the rapids). Now, over 40 years



later, it is still a formidable rapid and we'd have a good view of it from camp. We even saw rocks on the far side of the river that had crossed all the way during the landslide!

The tuna steaks were excellent - it had been a wonderful day. And this was just the first of 9! Although campfires were not allowed along the river (there was not much wood anywhere and the ashes would have to be packed out), we enjoyed the sunset and watching the stars come out. The entire Milky Way spread across the sky - we saw probably half a dozen satellites and several shooting stars. I could lie on my back all night in the sand and watch the show. Since we weren't using tents, I watched the stars a bit more after hitting the sack. It had been a long day, and it was probably only about 9:00, but my eyes got heavy rather quick.

## Jun 5 (day 2)

The conch blew early in the morning for our wake-up call - I remembered that had been our standard routine on our previous trip. It was a lot gentler than the obnoxious beeping of the alarm clock the morning before! I had already packed away my watch - I didn't want it getting wet or damaged on our trip, and besides we were on vacation and on "river time" anyway. It felt freeing to not be tied to a schedule all the time. My wallet, keys and cell phone were also safely packed away, so my pockets were empty - I felt a bit naked and insecure without my usual comforts with me at all times, but after a day or 2, I realized how much more rich the canyon experience could be without all the distractions.

Coffee and fruit was ready and the guides were prepping French toast for breakfast. The meal was very much enjoyed by all of us. We started to get used to the rituals around each meal - the conch blowing, the hand wash line, enjoying multiple passes through the buffet, then the cleanup. It was mostly the way I remembered from our trip the last time - only thing I noticed that was different is we no longer had the pump for the hand wash (it was lost in Hance Rapid a few days earlier - whoops!), but the guides had a creative way by recycling some containers to create a make-shift hand wash. The dish-washing line was the same as I remembered - 4 wash basins to scrub, wash, soak, and rinse the dishes. And there was a cute little rubber ducky floating in the last basin just as before, indicating the wash line was ready.

I'm glad we had a good breakfast, since as soon as we hit the water, we would have to deal with the immense Crystal rapid! In fact, before breaking camp, we walked up the bluff and all scoped it out ahead of time. The guides gave us a briefing to make sure we were ready. We would be paddling, and Sarah, one of the newest guides would be rowing through it for the first time.



*Crystal Rapid just downstream from our camp*

We formed the baggage line and soon we had everything packed on the boats and we were ready to hit the water. I was a bit nervous about the rapid - it might be a long and rocky swim if we were knocked out! And we didn't want to lose any other supplies! All our gear, sleeping bags, kitchen supplies, and food had to go through all the rapids (no shuttle bus to pick us up and take us to camp each day!) We all made it through just fine – thanks to some excellent guiding through the river.

The next series of rapids would be some of the biggest for the day as well - we had the "TASTERS" set to navigate - they are all minerals (following the Crystal theme): Tuna (not sure why this one is a fish - maybe it should be renamed to Topaz), Agate, Sapphire, Turquoise, Emerald, Ruby, Serpentine.

Just a little further we saw an old boat marooned high on the bank - it was the Ross Wheeler. A historic boat built by Bert Loper, it was abandoned in 1915 when his party gave up during their journey down the canyon shortly before one of the big rapids (but they made it down all the TASTERS rapids (of course in 1915, Crystal wasn't a big rapid before the landslide in 1966). They hiked out Bass Canyon just a bit downstream to the boat, and left the boat as a timeless relic high on one of the rocky shores. I couldn't imagine if we had to abandon our trip at this point and start hiking out! One of the guides during our safety briefing said that if any of us got bitten by a rattlesnake, they would have to be immediately flown out by helicopter. Instead of taking a risk that the bite would not be serious, the guide would pull out a satellite phone and the chopper would be there in probably less than an hour. I definitely took the canyon environment more seriously after hearing that - it was not an experience to be taken for granted!

We enjoyed a nice lunch of left-over tuna salad from the dinner the night before - making wraps and sandwiches. The guides had been prepping lunch while the rest of us were out exploring the boat. They had probably seen it many times anyway! Great use of time! It was cool knowing that this rafting company had been in business for many years and by now, the guides knew how to run things very efficiently.

Just on the other side of the beach was an interesting sculpted granite gorge - it was from a seasonal waterfall (it was bone-dry now), but the force of the water of numerous flash floods had left a beautiful sculpted pattern of granite waves in the rock. I carefully worked my way up the polished granite (and slipped a couple times in my sandals - I probably should bring climbing shoes next time), and found a hidden bathtub pool tucked back deep in the rocks. It was nice and warm and would have been quite inviting for a swim had it not been clogged with scum and algae! The water had obviously not flowed for a while and was quite stagnant - there was no outlet since the water had dropped a bit. It would be interesting to run the canyon during the monsoon season or early spring when these falls and pools would be getting replenished. My mind started to wander (which it often does during these sort of trips), and I came upon a good object lesson, to realize that if I have been given many things and did not pass blessings on to people around me and give back, that my life would be like one of the stagnant pools, full of scum. I think one of the big reasons I enjoy being deep in the wilderness is to see what God can teach us through nature.

A couple of my most anticipated places were to come just a little ways downstream. Shinumo canyon was next - I saw pictures in one of the books and was glad we were getting to see it! We had just barely gotten in the rafts after the Ross Wheeler and we were at the canyon. It was like a fairyland of water-polished rock all around us. We waded in the warm water (carefully since the rock was quite slick) upstream, and just around the corner was a waterfall and wonderful swimming hole. And behind the falls was a cave where you could swim behind the falls and come out through another tunnel right in the middle of the falls! I felt like being a kid all over again - this reminded me of old days at our lake house in Maryland where me and my cousins would go swimming in the waterfalls!

I had recently gotten a waterproof bag for my camera so I could take pictures rafting downstream and when we were near the water on hikes. This was a perfect place to have it to take pictures from behind the falls. I had a perfect looking shot when I was ready to take the camera out of the bag, but before unclipping the bag, I noticed some water had gotten in the bag. Hmm, and there was quite a bit of moisture. In fact, there was so much water that condensation had developed on the inside of the screen. I carefully turned on the camera and the lens opened just fine, but I couldn't get the screen to come on - hmmm, bummer. I managed to take a few pictures (at least it sounded like they took OK), but I couldn't see what I was doing. I might have to wait until I got home until I would be able to find out. I hoped the moisture didn't get inside the rest of the camera. John had his camera and being a very careful guy in general, I trusted his pictures to come out (and I knew we'd be sharing photos at the end of the trip anyway), but I was frustrated that some of my pictures might not come out.



*Shinumo canyon and falls*

I inspected the waterproof bag the camera was in, and I saw that it had developed a small tear near the seal. I had paid around \$20 for the bag - probably should have gotten a better one. I couldn't find the bag I used 2 years ago - oh well. At least it was my old camera (which had several other issues anyway, like hairs and dirt stuck on the sensor and a lens that you had to fiddle with occasionally to close). I had my new camera (which was in my "checked luggage" for the day in my dry bag), so it would have to wait until we got to camp. I'd try to be more careful with my new camera for the rest of the trip since that's what I would be relying on. But I only had 1 spare battery (the newer camera took an expensive lithium battery).

A little downstream from Shinumo was Elves Chasm - I had been really looking forward to this part from seeing pictures and hearing stories and the fact it was featured in our Belknap river guides. We would not be disappointed - it was truly magnificent. I would just have to be careful with my camera.

A short but steep hike over large boulders took us up the canyon with occasional waterfalls over the mossy rocks, caves through travertine bluffs, and pools. Just a ways ahead I could hear a bigger waterfall and soon after I finally caught a glimpse of the wonder. The canyon seemed to reveal its secrets slowly - in seeing photos, it looked like you'd find it all at once, but it took a bit more time than I expected to "discover" the place.

Elves Chasm does truly seem out-of-place, an oasis of green flowers, ferns and hanging gardens in an otherwise rocky, barren red-rock canyon. The water was warm and soothing. I just wanted to lay in the waterfalls for a bit. But then I saw some people going past me into a cave behind the falls. Interesting - it was like the cave at Shinumo, but instead of dead-ending,

this cave had a passageway going up. Intrigued by where it might go, I climbed up the slippery rocks and as the passage corkscrewed up, I noticed a window of light coming in. I hadn't really paid attention, but there was another cave mid-way up the falls, which turned out to connect with the cave at the base of the falls! I climbed to the entrance and one of the guides indicated it was safe to jump. Wow - I hadn't expected that! It was about a 10 foot drop into the deep green pool at the base of the falls - the place was like a perfect paradise indeed!

I gingerly snapped a bunch of photos, half expecting the camera to die at any moment, but also hoping the screen might miraculously come on any time. Although the screen never worked again (and never did, even long after the camera completely dried out), the lens and mechanism worked fine - whew!

We took turns, climbing up the slippery and mossy travertine formations and jumping down the falls - it was like being a kid all over again. By about my 3rd or 4th jump, however, I noticed a strange flapping feeling on my left foot. When I got out of the water, a quick inspection revealed that whoops, my left sandal had come completely separated at the heel! Luckily I was able to bend the other straps around to hold the sandal together temporarily until I found a better solution.



*Ready to jump down the falls in Elves Chasm*

Climbing gingerly over the slippery rocks on my broken sandal, I managed to follow the group back to the rafts, where we continued on the river to our next campsite shortly afterward. A large sandy area showed up on our right - that was Big Dune, where we were going to stay. The water level in the river had dropped, letting us camp low by the river where the sand was a bit cooler.

We quickly had the baggage line going and camp set up. I pulled out my new camera and since both cameras use an SD card, I was able to swap the cards and see if the pictures from the day had come out after all, using the working screen of my new camera. And yes they did! Whew - no pictures were lost - yay! And I also realized I could fix my broken sandal using a sock - tying the sock between one strap and the broken part of another strap, I created a make-shift strap that would hold the heel together - whew!

We had a bit of time before dinner - Ben was prepping chicken fillets for dinner, so I grabbed my new (working) camera and wandered along the sandy shore toward an obvious looking notch in the Tapeatz sandstone ledges just a bit upstream of our camp. With my newly repaired sandal, I managed the short but rough hike through the jagged boulders and cacti all around. Just around the corner was the beautiful notch in the sandstone ledges - even more interesting and magical than I had imagined from seeing it by the river. The water had carved a smooth path through the layers of sandstone, the flat ledges appearing like lines on a topographic map. Looking down, the sandstone revealed a magical pattern of layers, appearing like waves and circles where the water had scoured and tunneled its way through.

However, I reached for my camera and was setting up a magical looking scene - but when I turned on the camera, the lens had only extended a couple millimeters... Then the lens retracted and went out again a couple millimeters before retracting again and giving up saying "Lens error - restart camera". Hmmm - that's happened before on a previous trip, but very intermittently. This would have been a very inconvenient place to have that happen again, but after several repeated tries with the camera to no avail, I had to give up and accept that this camera may be ruined as well - bummer. It had been a tough day, ruining both of my cameras and my sandals... oh well. At least I wasn't injured or sick or anything though. I had to maintain that bit of perspective. I guess some of the sand from our campsite (Big Dune did have a lot of sand) had gotten in the lens and jammed it - I could tell by the groaning and grinding of the tiny plastic gears inside the lens assembly.

I took my other camera (with the broken screen, but working lens) and returned to the ledges and luckily managed to get a bunch of pictures. But when I swapped the memory card and started to check on the pictures, I saw many pictures with large black wedges on 2 corners of the frame - shoot, looks like they didn't come out. Maybe I'd have to hike back a 3rd time and try again. But a few pictures later, they all looked fine - only a couple were ruined and the best ones came out nice, whew! I looked at my old camera and realized sometimes the lens cover only had partially opened, but since the screen was broken, there was no visual feedback that I needed to take my finger and flick the cover the rest of the way open (I remember having to do that before - the camera is old and needed a bit of massaging).

The first conch blew, indicating the hors d'oeuvres were ready - fruit and snacks - nice! A little something to take my mind off my camera casualties. I just hoped my old camera would hold out for the rest of the trip! Ben offered to lend me an extra pair of sandals for the trip - I didn't expect the sock to hold for very long!

The second conch blew and we lined up for chicken fillets for dinner and peach cobbler for dessert - the guides really knew how to treat us well! We were again treated to a wonderful display of the dark night sky while sipping beers and socializing for a while. No moon or lights to get in the way to block our view of the Milky Way, numerous shooting stars and several satellites.

### Jun 6 (day 3)

We awoke to the smell of bacon and eggs cooking - the unmistakable aroma filled the air around our camp. The camera issues were in the back of my mind, but they seemed far-off with the wonderful breakfast and beautiful sunrise greeting the new day.

We had planned a relatively short day, getting to Stone Creek camp early and enjoying an extended hike and exploring around the falls. But we had to first manage Bedrock rapid, one of the infamous drops that have capsized boats before. Ben and Bert drew a map of the rapid in the sand with the typical lines that river runners need to know. I knew Carrie would direct us through, but I knew the rapid had to be a bit serious to require a briefing beforehand! And right behind Bedrock was Dubendorff - got to love that name! The Clyde Eddy expedition in 1927 flipped their boat containing themselves, a dog and a black bear cub in this rapid!

We nailed both the big rapids Bedrock and Dubendorff - thanks to some great guiding and experience. We took quite a hit on Dubendorff, nearly swamping the raft, but it was so much fun! Carrie wanted to correct us - instead of saying "good job Carrie, we nailed that one", she passed up the credit and said instead "the river gods were good to us". A little ways downstream, we noticed the "Great Unconformity" - a feature that has baffled geologists to this day. According to some scientists, there is a billion year gap in the rock formations. The granite and schist are very old, but the rocks right above them (the Tapeatz sandstone) is much younger. Either a bunch of layers were never deposited, they got deposited at one point, but then eroded away, or the geologists still really have no idea, or the "rock gods" were just playing with us. I mentioned before I'm a bit agnostic about geologic age (the "creationists" and the "evolutionists" have been fighting a religious battle for centuries). I just found it interesting that we can be quick to attribute unknown or uncertain elements to abstract gods that we don't know.

We were now back in the Inner Gorge - the granite and schist walls closed in, creating the canyon's narrowest part, and the otherwise calm green water swirled in all places with eddies coming from deep underwater. It was getting hot paddling through the flat water, so we took turns jumping off the raft, doing back flips and diving in the cool water. The cold water nearly took my breath away for a split second, but it actually felt quite good to cool off for a few minutes. We challenged each other to see if we could get back in the raft without assistance.

We also played a game by standing on opposite sides of the raft, locking paddles and slowly leaning away from each other and maintaining balance. We got nearly 45 degrees apart until our paddles slipped apart and we both splashed in the water!

Stone Creek was coming up - I was looking forward to lunch and going hiking after a bit of flat water. However, when we got there, to my dismay we saw a bunch of other rafts already parked there - they had beaten us to it - bummer. But the cloud had a silver lining - instead, we later pushed on to Deer Creek (which we were going to skip) and got an extended hike there.

We had lunch at Talking Heads - named after some formations in the metamorphic rocks around us. I poked around in a short canyon there and noticed some green minerals in the rocks - I think it was serpentine, formed under intense heat and pressure. It was interesting to remember we were nearly 5000 feet below the rim of the canyon and the pressure must have been intense many years ago!

After lunch we headed a little further down the Colorado, where the towering cascade of Deer Creek falls was visible on the right. Just a couple other rafts and a motor rig were there - there was plenty of room. Being one of the most interesting features in the canyon (the Belknap guide features 3 separate photos of the area!), I would have been quite bummed to have to skip it! I'm glad we skipped Stone Creek after all!



*Deer Creek falls*



The falls were truly magnificent - a nearly 100 foot thundering ribbon of spring water flowing out of a deep slot canyon in the Tapeatz sandstone high above our heads. A few people tried to hike and swim and fight their way to get close to the falls, but the hurricane like winds coming off the plunging water, the currents and slippery footing made it nearly impossible! We would get blasted right out of there - you didn't have to worry about drowning in the falls since you couldn't get close enough!

We had several choices of hikes - to hike to the top of the falls and along some ledges in the Tapeatz narrows above the falls, and some people decided to hike further all the way to the source, Thunder River gushing from the Redwall layer high above. Of course, since I didn't know when I was going to be back to this part of the Grand Canyon anytime soon, I opted for the most exploration. The wave-like layers of the Tapeatz slot canyon were magnificent, like an impressionist artist had swooshed his brush through the rock. Even though we weren't deep in the canyon (we were traversing a ledge mid-way up the canyon, and to get to the bottom required a rappel and we didn't bring a rope - maybe next time), we still marveled at the magical environment. I wonder how John Wesley Powell would have thought back in 1869 during his expedition to discover this place for the first time! Well - actually some natives had already been there many years ago - evidenced by some faint white hand-prints sprinkled along the walls of the slot canyon.

Just past the slot, the canyon opened to a wide series of ledges where many folks hung out and played in the waterfalls. You could go a couple tiers down into the canyon but not quite all the way without climbing gear - but it was enough to get a good feel of the canyon. About half the group went on to hike up to the source of the creek - called Thunder River. Even though the hike was probably only another mile further up the canyon, the 100 degree heat and exposed trails made for a tough hike. I was feeling a little woozy probably from the heat by the time we made it to the falls, but when we found a trail that actually went behind the falls, I was able to put my head in the spray and cool down a bit - I imagine if early explorers came to this spot and found this gushing spring they would be inclined to view it as a holy spot. It would be interesting to be able to climb up the falls and somehow explore the network of tunnels and caves the spring would have carved through the limestone.

We took turns sitting in the "thrones" in the Throne Room, a giant amphitheatre that overlooks the falls with rocks that had been placed to form big chairs - it was good to sit and relax for a moment and enjoy the sound of the rushing water in the desert. A few birds chirped in the cottonwoods and other riparian plants nearby - it was truly an oasis in the desert.

It was a hot hike back to the ledges where the rest of the group had stopped, but we had a nice half hour or so to explore and play in the numerous waterfalls for a while. The canyon below looked so enticing, but I had to restrain myself to not get too close and end up sliding down on a 1-way trip! I'm glad we had most of the afternoon at Deer Creek - it's actually an area many people hike down to from the rim (you have to drive on some remote unpaved and 4WD roads to get to the trailhead, hike down to the "Esplanade", camp, then get to Deer Creek the next day).



*Slot canyon in Tapeatz ledges above Deer Creek falls*

It was a long day and it was getting late (we spent a bit longer at Deer Creek than planned, but I wasn't complaining!) - We found a site just downstream to camp at Poncho's Kitchen. Here the Tapeatz layers reached all the way to the river and provided some nice ledges to camp on. A giant cave (sort of like Redwall Cavern) was just behind our camp. Some people ended up sleeping in the sloping sand inside the cavern but most people found some nice ledges right by the river to camp.

Dinner was filet mignon cooked by our guide Phil - probably the best of the whole trip! Phil's kitchen inside Poncho's kitchen had the delicious aroma of meat as it was being grilled - a delightful place to be. After devouring a full steak and a bunch of veggies and enjoying some cake for dessert, I heard Johnna saying she had her Swiss army knife and a piece of parachute cord and she could fix my sandal - yay! It took some time and a bit of effort, but she did an excellent job - thanks! I returned Ben's sandals saying thanks for letting me borrow them. And to cap off a perfect evening, I pulled out my new camera (the completely dead one) and just wanted to experiment with it, and bingo, the lens came out just fine - good as new. I couldn't believe it! Maybe the "camera gods" were smiling. Or God was extending His grace - He was providing a way for me to share the beauty of His creation in order for people to give Him praise. I didn't want to be like a "stagnant pool", taking in His blessings without being able to pour them out to others. I like that explanation far better!

## Jun 7 (day 4)

This morning was blueberry pancakes for breakfast - my favorite! I feel by now I was able to totally relax and enjoy being in the canyon - any other cares at home were far away.



*Carrie showing off her climbing skills*

Carrie got to show off some of her rock-climbing skills by our camp - playing on the Tapeatz layers in the big cave, traversing to higher ledges until she was nearly upside down on the ceiling! Wow - she was good - it might have been a 5.10 difficulty but she made it look easy. I'm glad the cave had a sandy floor to cushion a fall should it happen (she was probably 10-12 feet up!) With my newly working camera, I managed to grab a few photos - with the right perspective, it looked like she should be on the cover of a climbing magazine!

I decided to do a bit of exploring - with my working camera, I felt rejuvenated and empowered once again! Finding a small use trail through the bushes behind our camp, I started following it wondering what it might lead to. I was intrigued at what may be hidden (I didn't ask anyone - if I did manage to find something interesting I could revel in the glory of fresh discovery, maybe like what John Wesley Powell might have thought on his expedition, but in a smaller way). The trail wound its way up a rocky drainage toward one of the cliffs toward what appeared to be an overhang. A little further up revealed the overhang to be a large cavern probably 200 feet deep with an entrance at least 50 feet wide! I should have brought a flashlight - I relied on camera

flashes to light up the back of the cave (I knew my battery was limited so I tried not to use too many flashes though). Sitting in the stillness and cool by the entrance of the cavern (it was 20-30 degrees cooler than outside), I pulled my devotional and meditated for a minute. I was reminded of how Jesus had to go to a quiet place occasionally to meditate and pray by himself. I've found it easy to experience spiritual dryness on vacations, being away from my routine and getting so wrapped up in emotions and my immediate surroundings that I can easily lose the spiritual perspective. Having a few minutes to reflect on God's grace and goodness definitely rejuvenated my spirit.



*Enormous cavern above our camp*

It was a pretty mellow morning - we plodded our way along the river until we reached Olo Canyon on our left. It was a nice lunch spot with a wide sandy beach where we could have a natural shower as well - a trickle of water dropped from an amphitheatre high above in a gentle spray of fresh water. I feel the Grand Canyon has surprises around every bend - even though this spot wasn't featured in the Belknap guide, it had quite a nice refuge from the heat in a very scenic setting.

One of my favorite hikes of the trip ended up being our next pull-out after lunch, Matkatamiba canyon. This curvy slot in the Muav limestone was truly magical, winding its way along a sinuous path through layers in the smooth rock. Phil was a great hiking guide, showing us techniques to make our way up through the canyon. Sometimes you'd put your hands on one wall and feet on the other, forming a bridge across the canyon and sometimes you'd put your butt on one wall and chimney up the narrow parts. We passed packs and gave people boosts as necessary - formed a wonderful team so everybody could get up the smooth rock. Often you had to use a technique that was very non-intuitive to scramble up the next section - often with climbing, it's about technique instead of brute-forcing your way up. At the top of the canyon was a wide "patio" area with sweeping sandstone ledges all around where some people napped and sat in the shade for a while.



*Muav narrows in Matkatamiba canyon*

The canyon had seemed to appear suddenly when we were rafting - there wasn't anything like it nearby. I'm glad our guides really know the canyon well and where to take us! And they showed us how to navigate and climb our way up so we could all enjoy it - I think the guides sensed we were a pretty responsible group and could handle the challenge of Matkatamiba canyon - very cool.

Back down at the rafts, we were starting to pack our things and get on our way once again. It had been a fairly relaxed pace on the river for most of the day. We had just 1 big rapid - Upset, to deal with a little ways further. A boat in the US Geological survey party in 1923 flipped in this rapid, giving it its name. We managed to get all our rafts through relatively unscathed (though it was a big hit for us and we took on quite a bit of water. Thank goodness the rafts are self-bailing!)

We continued downstream where the Muav limestone ledges paralleled the river - we picked a camp at Upper Ledges, giving a convenient set of flat areas for the kitchen and our sleeping bags. Dinner was chicken burritos by Bert - better than any restaurant! Enjoying gourmet food in a remote wilderness setting was wonderful. I'm used to being in the wilderness on backpacking trips where we're eating freeze-dried dinners and energy bars - we're willing to sacrifice on good food for a couple days. I can see why this rafting company has been in business for so many years - and they had the cooking routine mastered by now! With 2 rafts

with just gear, we didn't have to scrimp on anything - even one of our guides Heather took her guitar!

Upper Ledges was quite a scenic spot, with hundreds of layers of Muav and Redwall limestone ledges above. A rocky trail led up about 400 feet to the base of the Redwall to a gaping amphitheatre created by seasonal floods - the amphitheatre was probably 100 feet in diameter, consisting of dozens of stair-step layers of limestone that you could easily hike up. The entirety of our camp was visible far below - it was fun to see the layout of the kitchen and where people had stretched their sleeping bags and tarps. I felt our entire group could have sit in the rows of the amphitheatre and if Heather took her guitar we'd have a wonderful show!

Back down at river level, the ledges were scalloped from high river flows over the centuries - there were even spots where rocks had become trapped and swirled in the current, slowly drilling deep potholes. Right near our sleeping bag was a 10-foot deep pothole that had drilled all the way through an overhanging ledge, creating a vertical shaft that a nimble climber could chimney through - several of us took turns going through!

I was tired from the last couple days, but with the anticipation of Havasu canyon the next day, and the rocky ledges retaining heat for many hours after dark, it was hard to think about sleep. We prepped sack lunches for the next day and chatted and took notes on the day (my camera was still working, but even so I knew I'd never remember everything we saw!). Eventually my eyelids grew heavy and I turned in for the night.

## Jun 8 (day 5)

I woke up with the first morning conch, but I lay in bed until the second one, cherishing the bit of extra rest. Breakfast was pretty quick, just bagels and oatmeal and coffee, since we wanted to get going early on our big hike down Havasu canyon.

I had hiked down Havasu canyon from the rim about 4 years ago - we drove 12 hours from San Jose, past Kingman, AZ where we took the old route 66 to Peach Springs. Driving a seemingly abandoned desert road, we hardly saw anyone on the road for almost an hour - I started to question if we were lost and going the wrong way, until suddenly we reached the trailhead brimming with cars. We were lucky to find one of the last parking spaces! We backpacked down to the Supai village where we enjoyed burgers and ice cream and got a bottle of wine for our camp at Havasu Falls. The next day we hiked past Mooney and then down to Beaver falls for the day. We talked about hiking all the way to the Colorado, but it would have been a long hike and we wouldn't have had much time at the falls. I had planned to go back someday and make it to the river. I enjoyed Havasu canyon so much that I would never forget the paradise of the blue-green water and palm trees and red rocks all around (I called it Hawaii within the Grand Canyon!)

Well, here we were, 4 years later, pulling our rafts into the mouth of Havasu canyon. There's not much of a beach so we tied our rafts right inside the mouth of the canyon where the light blue-green waters mix with the dark green waters of the Colorado. Hiking up the Muav ledges,

we paralleled Havasu creek for several miles, sometimes having to cross the creek and sometimes hiking right in the water. The water was warm and refreshing and the turquoise color was that of paradise! Occasionally, small travertine rims had formed in the rapids where the creek dropped, foreshadowing what was to come shortly.



*Hiking up Havasu creek*

During one of our creek crossings, one of the guides spotted movement on the far shore - it was a rattlesnake! Charming the snake with a long stick, he got the snake to slowly move off the trail while providing an interesting show of the snake's movements. I'm glad he spotted the snake first instead of the snake finding us first, biting us and forcing us to turn back immediately to have someone flown out by helicopter - whew!

Just another 1/2 mile and we saw the boundary sign between the Grand Canyon national park and the Havasupai tribal land - I remembered that sign from 4 years ago from when we went to Beaver falls last time! Beaver Falls was just below us now so we were close. I can say now I've been the whole way to the Colorado down Havasu creek - that was my dream on my previous trip. It finally happened now - I just had to do it in 2 parts!

The falls was like paradise - multiple tiers created by the travertine over the centuries created a network of interconnected pools where you could jump down from one to another. Ben took turns showing us a cave under one of the falls - I was in the water by the falls when I saw an outstretched hand, and when I grabbed his hand he pulled me under and we popped up in a chamber behind the falls. The water was glowing an iridescent light blue from the sunlight refracting through, creating a magical shimmering on the sculpted travertine all around. I wish I had my camera, but I don't think photos could have done the place justice!



*Jumping from Beaver falls*

I was glad to have the sack lunch and spend a couple hours at the falls - there was so much to explore and places to relax and enjoy the cool blue water under the hot sun. I recalled the paradise from 4 years ago and I loved being able to re-live it all. I wished we had a layover day at Havasu creek so we could spend all day and go up further to Mooney and Havasu as well, but we'd have to come back on a future trip. We chatted with some backpackers who had come down from the rim, and I remembered 4 years ago meeting people who hiked up from the river - I now have 2 completely different but wonderful experiences around Beaver falls.

The afternoon was getting late and we had to start making our way back. Nearing "Rattlesnake crossing", we kept our eyes out to see if the snake was still around - we didn't want anyone getting bitten again! The snake was indeed still there, hiding in the shade under some rocks, so we were safe. We continued through the riparian habitat along the trail, following the rocky shore where we passed through a travertine cave leading to the "motor pools" (where many river rafters on the motor boats hang out without hiking very far up the canyon). Some of our group also only went up to the motor pools and we hung out together for probably another 1/2 hour before the guides rounded us up to get back on the rafts.

We had planned to camp just a little further downstream at Tockup canyon on the right - it was later than we expected (we spent probably an hour longer than we should have at Havasu, but I didn't mind!), so I was glad to find Tockup was close. But just past the rapids around the corner, I was dismayed to see a raft there. Then another, and another - probably 6 total. Shoot, it was taken - bummer. I had no idea where we would be camping, and neither did the guides. They warned us of sometimes Plan A goes to B and sometimes all the way to F. We were on an expedition and I knew there would be uncertainties, but at this point I was tired and just wanted to pull into camp. But much to our relief, just a couple miles further, we saw that National was open! National is known as one of the best sites along this stretch and we would have it to ourselves - the cloud had a wonderful silver lining.



After running the baggage line and getting camp set up, a few of us set out to explore the canyon. Ben said this was a particularly interesting hike - if you go just 15 minutes up the canyon, there were some wonderful things. I was stoked and I soon started heading up the canyon, forgetting my tiredness from the long day. Just behind me I saw Alex and his dad Will following. The canyon was fairly deep but wide with a dry gravelly bottom - seemed like the average run-of-the-mill side canyon.

But I trusted Ben's word and continued up. Soon afterward, there was a small stream flowing down the gravelly bed - interesting there was water after all. I hastened my pace until around the corner we discovered a wonderful "patio" area of ledges, sort of like at the top of Matkatamiba yesterday. And just past the patio, the canyon quickly narrowed into a beautiful curvy slot! Remembering some of Phil's techniques from the previous day, I was able to wade through some pools and chimney up a set of corkscrew narrows along a small waterfall. I felt more confident in the technique and it was a thrill to get up the falls successfully!



*Narrows at National canyon*

Just past the falls, the canyon continued twisting upstream through a series of "teacup" plunge pools - it was like a vast outdoor playground of sculpted layered rock to play on! I wonder how many people would be just hanging out at camp and miss these wonders just 15 minutes up the canyon! After about half a dozen pools, the canyon reached a dead-end, probably about a 20 foot overhanging waterfall. I was quite satisfied where I was and didn't feel I needed to try to climb further, so I just soaked in the falls and then thought about the burgers and bratwurst that were on the grill waiting for us when we got back to camp.

Getting back down the canyon was a little sketchy - I knew I had to chimney back down, relying on counterbalancing my weight and using friction to inch my way down. My first instinct was just to slide down - a bad idea since it would have been about a 12-15 foot drop if I got out of control down the near-vertical plunge. I had to overcome my instinct and stop and think for a moment about my technique. Thanks to Phil for showing us the right techniques and giving us

confidence, we could really enjoy ourselves and accomplish something I would have never expected! Now I just wish we had more of these types of canyons closer to home...

It had been a wonderful day - with both highlights of Havasu creek and then the narrows of National canyon. And to top it off, the burgers and bratwurst were perfect, and we even celebrated with birthday cake for dessert - it was both John and Mark's birthday!

## Jun 9 (day 6)

The next morning, we knew we had our biggest challenge of the trip - Lava Falls! It was the only rapid that would be rated a 10 on the Colorado (probably a class IV+ to V). I'm not sure why the Grand Canyon uses a different scale - perhaps it's because there is so much water that even though the rapids are big, most boats can pick a line and people would hunker down and just power their way through. On many rivers, like the Tuolumne in CA, the rapids are far more technical, requiring finesse to navigate the lines between boulders and holes.



*Morning at camp at National beach*

After some delicious French toast for breakfast, we set out on the river. The morning started off quite mellow (the calm before the storm!), but we thought about the rapids that awaited us around the bend. At this point, we could start seeing evidence of volcanic activity in the canyon - most of the layers before had been sandstone and limestone on top of the schist / granite inner gorge. But now, black volcanic boulders strewn about the banks of the Colorado foreshadowed the changes that were to come.

Around the corner, we saw the monument of Vulcan's Anvil, the plug of an ancient volcano. The site is sacred to the Native Americans who lived along this stretch of the canyon - and for us it meant to buckle our seatbelts for Lava Falls just a mile downstream. Just before Lava Falls, we

got out to scout the rapid and get some good photos of the tumbling maelstrom of white water just below. It seemed such an inhospitable environment - it was probably 105 degrees outside on the jagged pointy black volcanic rocks and the river's currents were relentless below us. Yet I noticed groupings of prickly barrel cactuses (we were getting into the Mohave desert now) with delicate fresh yellow blossoms. It was as if there was a reminder that God's grace was still with us even if we should walk through the fire and be pounded by the waters. I tried to think about the peacefulness of the flowers to deal with the butterflies in my stomach for the next 15 minutes or so.

One of the rafts decided to stay behind and run after we had all been through - that way Itai with his expensive SLR camera (he must have been pretty brave!) would be able to capture all of us going through the monstrous rapid below! Meanwhile the rest of us hiked back to the rafts and started gearing up for the adventure. Carrie had made us practice hunkering down - we knew the boat would be swamped in a second in the swirling waters! She would yell "GET DOWN!" and we'd immediately know what to do!



*Paddle raft in Lava Falls*

Back on the paddle raft, we were just getting ready to set out, but we were dismayed to see one of the paddles had gone missing - I think some people were screwing around and dropped one of the paddles and sent it tumbling downstream into the rapids - whoops! Hmm - I hoped that would not be a bad premonition of what was to follow. We pulled one of the spare paddles (we had about 3 extras on the gear boat - didn't want to be up the creek without a paddle, especially here!), and got on our way, slowly drifting downstream.

One wave hit us on the right, then a bigger one on the left, then GET DOWN! We all hunkered down, and for a few brief moments I felt suspended in time, not knowing what lay just beyond.

All I could see was water splashing in all directions - a wave nearly knocked my hat and sunglasses right off! I felt like I was completely underwater - but a second later I was reassured when I could still feel the safety of the rubber raft below me. The biggest waves had passed - all was relatively calm again and I felt we had re-emerged into reality again. Then came a RIGHT BACK - we had to make a quick right turn to get back centered on the river, before hitting some more rocks, and then we had to do a LEFT BACK to turn left to get to shore. We were heading to Tequila beach just at the base of the rapids - a popular "celebration spot" for people who had just finished Lava Falls. We watched Itai's boat come through last - hoping his camera would be safe!

We all nailed the rapid - nobody fell out, nothing was lost and all was calm again! We even managed to recover the paddle we had lost above Lava Falls! We enjoyed a nice lunch on the rocky ledges as we watched a motor rig come through the rapid, nearly swamping the enormous raft, before they turned and parked at Tequila beach as well. I wondered if anybody was up at Toroweap overlook high above us watching and seeing if we were going to make it through!

A couple people recognized some folks on the motor rig - they had hung out at the "motor pools" the previous day on Havasu creek - small world! We got to see some of Itai's photos - it seemed incredible that we all got through unscathed - in some of the pictures, you can just see part of the nose of the raft above water! After lunch, I looked back and saw almost all of our guides napping on the rafts! I'm sure they were quite nervous (and rightly so), especially for Sarah on her first trip. I enjoyed a brief nap as well - I must have been more tired than I thought, since when I woke up again I was a bit stiff from sleeping in an awkward position.

After lunch, it was fairly smooth sailing up to Whitmore wash - we got to just enjoy the scenery for a while and let the current take us downstream. By now, lava had spilled along the walls of the canyon high overhead - sometimes multiple rows of columnar basalt spanned above our heads for hundreds of feet. Just near the shore, we spotted a few bighorn sheep. Then around the corner came a helicopter! He sounded pretty close and then I realized he was about to land! I hoped somebody hadn't been bitten by a snake or something and had to be flown out. It turned out there's a helicopter pad at Whitmore and many folks end their trip there (we still had almost 3 more days!)

Just another mile or so was Whitmore canyon on our right. You could tell where the original canyon was and how it had changed through the centuries as the lava dammed up the original canyon, forcing the creek to form a whole new channel. An interesting spot to camp. We had our gear set up pretty quick - after many days we had it down to a science now.

Will and I took some time to explore a bit up the canyon - after National the previous day, I hoped for the best bit of surprise. I hadn't asked Ben about this canyon, but it looked short and we could just go a little way. The canyon went up for about 1/2 mile where it appeared to dead-end. I was about to turn back when we realized it made a sharp right turn (maybe this is how it was re-directed after the lava flow) - just past the turn was an enormous lava cliff with a dry-falls. It appeared water tumbled off a high lava cliff - the columnar basalt were bent and seemed to pour off the falls as well. The canyon had been bone-dry, but at the base of the dry-falls was

a deep emerald pool, tucked deep in the rocks. It was a secret and hidden spot I don't imagine many people would get to.



*Hiking up Whitmore canyon*

I saw Will starting to climb one of the cliffs - about 75 feet up was a ledge above the lowest tier of the falls. It seemed simple enough to get to, but after 3 attempts along different routes, our plans were foiled by 15 foot cliffs and a sketchy looking traverse - oh well. It looked like there would be another pool with beautiful sculpted rocks just past the cliffs - you could tell by where the water had flowed before. The cliffs looked doable and we even saw footprints on the other side of a crumbly class 4 traverse, but this was the last place we wanted to attempt something and get hurt - oh well, better to be safe than sorry.

I heard the conch blow faintly as we were hiking back and a little further I could smell the aroma of Phil's pork chops just coming off the grill. Even though we were a bit foiled on our exploration, we were happy and enjoyed a wonderful dinner. Both of my cameras were still (marginally) working and my sandal held together so life was still good!

## Jun 10 (day 7)

We awoke to the smell of eggs & bacon for breakfast. This was mostly a paddling day - there weren't as many rapids and side canyons on this stretch. I felt like the best of the trip was behind us and we were just waiting to get to the end. But I didn't want to think of it that way - we

still had 2 more days to enjoy, relaxing on the river and just chilling for a bit. I hadn't really relaxed much on this trip, since otherwise I might have felt like I could have missed things and maybe wasted an opportunity (like if we had just relaxed at National, we would have missed that wonderful slot canyon). But at this point, I was glad to just relax and unwind a bit so I wouldn't get too burned out.

We had a few hours of pretty leisurely paddling until mile 202 where we enjoyed lunch along one of the beaches. The wind had kicked up - gusts blowing upstream and rippling the water and even causing some whitecaps. I remembered some wild wind on our previous trip - it looked like one of our guides was going to get sucked up in a small tornado at one point! We challenged each other to try the Frisbee - you'd throw it 10 feet forward and it would fly 50 feet backward if you didn't throw it right! Luckily we had a nice spot tucked in the tamarisk and mesquite bushes sheltered from the wind for our burrito wraps for lunch. Some small lava caves and a nice side canyon were nearby. I was always curious to see what was around each of our spots since the Grand Canyon hides many mysteries, so I went out for a bit of exploration. The side canyon quickly narrowed to a slot where a 15-foot boulder choke blocked the entrance - quite scenic but would have been hard to go further without a rope - oh well. The caves were interesting - probably caused by large air pockets in the lava as it cooled. One of the entrances gave a perfect picture, framing our lunch spot and rafts parked on the sandy shore.



*Lunch spot from lava cave*

After lunch the wind was howling (always seemed to be in the wrong direction - it was quite a stiff headwind). We hitched with Heather's oar boat (saving us a bit of energy of paddling into

the wind). And as an added blessing, she was playing the guitar as Phil was rowing - life was good even when things may have seemed rough around us!



*Enjoying some good music on the river*

We hit a few small rapids every couple miles (205, 207, 209 - seems like they ran out of names at this point in the river), before pulling in our camp at Pumpkin Springs. It was a pretty quiet day but it was nice to just relax and hang out a bit. Pumpkin Springs was interesting - a large bathtub shaped travertine formation about 15 feet across and 6 feet high. It looked beautiful from the outside, but bummer the water was a bit scummy and bitter from arsenic and other chemicals. And it was only about 6 inches deep inside - most of the pool was filled in, so it wasn't so good for swimming - oh well. Hiking up the lava bluffs behind camp revealed we were definitely in the Mohave Desert by now - the prickly chollas, ocotillos and barrels were all around.



*Reaching our camp at Pumpkin spring*

Dinner was chicken enchiladas by Bert - wonderful food. We spent most of the evening just lounging and relaxing and playing a bit on the big sand dunes right by the river. It was nice to bathe with soap in the river - the water was warm enough now to sit in the river for a few minutes now...

### Jun 11 (day 8)

Blueberry pancakes and sausage greeted us for breakfast - again my favorites! I had also sort of written off this day as just covering the last few miles to finish the trip, but I found out this would end up being one of the more interesting days. A little ways downstream was Travertine canyon - a slot canyon and a bunch of grottos carved from calcium carbonate mineral deposits from a set of travertine springs above.

We made sack lunches at camp again (we'd be having lunch from inside the grotto) and packed up to hit the river again. After paddling through some of the first couple rapids, I was a bit bummed when I noticed my right eye started giving me trouble - I fiddled with my contact lens a little when it started to sting quite a bit. I had to take it out while on the raft to inspect and clean it, but when I looked at it, I saw it had developed a small tear - that wasn't good. I think with the sand, sunscreen, hot sun and dust over 8 days on the river, my contact had finally given up. I had extra contacts stored away but it was just easier to manage with 1 good contact for the rest of the day - oh well.



But I forgot about all the troubles with my contact once we got to Travertine canyon. I pulled my newer camera with the hope that it would be having a good day, and when I turned it on, the lens opened just fine - was good as new - whew! The canyon was spectacular, with a creek running through, leaving a beautiful emerald green set of deposits, cementing all the gravel and rocks in place. The Hualapai Indians had installed a set of ropes and ladders allowing us to climb a series of waterfalls and navigate the steep rocks to get to the grottos inside the canyon - wonderful!



*Travertine grotto falls*

It was a bit of paradise - it reminded me a bit of Havasu canyon, with the travertine formations and grottos all around. The canyon ended with about a 30 foot waterfall of warm spring water flowing down the travertine cliff - a perfect spot for a nice shower. We enjoyed our sack lunches tucked in one of the grottos of the canyon while listening to the babbling creek tumbling down the travertine ledges all around - very nice!

We were just hiking out of the canyon when we saw a big group just coming in - we had the place all to ourselves! But now there were going to be about 30 more people! Lucky we got in when we did! Just as we were most of the way back to the rafts I felt a flapping again on my left sandal - the parachute cord fix put in on the 3rd day had finally pulled through - bummer. At least this was our last hike for the trip and I had the sock again as a backup and it would only have to last for the last day (I threw the sandals away as soon as we got off the river!)

In the afternoon, we had a wonderful set of rapids (by now they were just mile numbers - they had gotten tired of giving names) - there was mile 232, 234, 235, 236 rapids. They were the perfect roller-coaster rapids with great wave trains. We had gotten pretty good at hitting the wave trains just right now to make a perfect ride - we would bob up and down over the 10-12 foot waves and the raft would tilt up and down at about a 45 degree angle - great fun! And the view of the perfect pyramidal 3500 ft Diamond peak capped off the experience perfectly.

We passed Travertine Falls just downstream of Travertine canyon - it was like a huge petrified waterfall where over the centuries the mineral deposits had accumulated. I wondered if there were more springs and another travertine canyon up there. There is always so much to explore - only so much you can see on one trip! If I ran a private trip, it would be cool to stop and explore all the side canyons and attractions. But it would probably take a month! And besides I have a friend who has been waiting 15 years to get on a private trip (it is by lottery and is extremely difficult to win a spot!)

For the last few miles, we hitched all 6 of our rafts into a nice flotilla - the wind had shifted and even given us a bit of a tailwind now, so we got to just coast downstream. It was so peaceful. Johnna had brought her Native American flute and was playing an ancient melody - relaxing and drifting down the calm waters of the Colorado and hearing the soft tones of the flute made for a timeless moment. I wish we could have had a month on the river!



*Johnna on her flute*

We pulled into our last camp - Separation Canyon. There are 2 long straight canyons on either side of the river at this point - created by a fault (Separation fault) which weakened the rock and

allowed the side canyons to form along a line. It was at Separation Canyon that 3 people left John Wesley Powell's group in 1869, climbed out of the canyon but were then killed by Indians on the way. (A memorial plaque just above our campsite had the whole story).

This would be our own Separation point as well - 2 of our guides hooked the rafts together with a transom, rigged a small motor and took the flotilla of rafts downstream to Pearce Ferry. They would be motoring through the night (it took many hours to go those 40 miles). The rest of us made our last camp at the beach and we celebrated with our last dinner - Bert and Sarah were making pesto pasta with chicken as Heather was giving us some wonderful entertainment on the guitar (and making up words on the fly about our trip - she is so creative!)

It was strange to be there on the remote beach with just ourselves without the rafts parked right there. We knew in the morning a jet boat would come and pick us up (they actually swung by that night and parked nearby so we had the assurance they were going to be on time!). Another raft swung by after dropping off their passengers (probably at Diamond Creek), and they dropped off their cooler of extra beers for us! Apparently there was more beer than all the passengers finished so we scored a free case of Coors light! Life was good.

## Jun 12 (day 9)

Alas, this was our last day on the canyon - we were just finishing up breakfast when we could hear the gentle hum of the jet boat coming our way. We were about 40 miles from Pearce Ferry, but we would reach there in less than an hour - the jet boat could reach 45-50 miles/hour on the smooth water. We were officially on Lake Mead now - the water was calm and there were no more rapids.

The ride was quite fun - it felt like we were flying through the Grand Canyon! For the whole trip, we were just slowly floating our way through for the most part, moseying down the river with the current at about 3-4 miles/hour. But now, 50 miles/hour seemed incredible! The wind was blowing my hair back (and forget wearing a hat anymore!) as we whisked around the bends of the canyon.

A few miles further downstream, I noticed a familiar landmark high up on the left rim - the Grand Canyon Skywalk (one of the guides called it the Toilet Bowl since that's what it looks like from underneath - and he complained it's a tourist rip-off too!). I was on the Skywalk a few years ago with some friends and I thought it was interesting. But I felt it was a been-there-done-that sort of thing and I didn't need to go back. It was expensive (\$75 for the day there) but at least we did get some wonderful views.



*John and others on the jet-boat*

As we neared Pearce Ferry, we could see how layers of sediment had built up around the sides of the lake - Lake Mead has dropped over 100 feet due to droughts and over-use by water in southern CA. I wonder how much sediment is at the bottom of Lake Mead and how much longer the dam will be functioning before they would have to clear out the sediment (once sediment gets inside the intakes it could start to damage the power plant, and there would be that much less water in the reservoir as well). When the monsoon hits every summer, the Colorado is a muddy brown torrent of water, full of sediment.

Just around the corner we could see vehicles (the first vehicles I had seen in 9 days!) - I knew there was our truck to haul our gear out. There was another rafting trip scheduled in a couple days, so the guides would have to shuttle the gear all the way back to Lee's ferry, prep all the food and supplies (and get a new foot-pedal for the water pump!), dump all the toilet waste (Mike Rowe should have something on Dirty Jobs for that one), and get everything cleaned up for the next run on the river.

We got our final farewell shot of our group - it was a wonderful trip and thanks to Outdoors Unlimited for a wonderful adventure on the river!



*Our whole group*

Our luxury coach had just pulled in - our ride back to Las Vegas. I sort of got a bit teary eyed knowing our 9 days was over and we were heading back to the garish lights and crowds of Vegas. And the sky seemed to get teary-eyed too. An early season weather system started moving in and we got a bit of rain while on the bus through the Mohave Desert on our way back to Vegas (the guides say June is the driest month, so the rain was quite unusual). We left just in time - all our days were sunny and warm (a couple clouds right near the end, but nothing too substantial), but it was changing (they predicted scattered thunderstorms and cooler temperatures for a couple days right as we left).

Going to Vegas seemed a bit anti-climactic as we said good-bye to the others. A few folks had their cars shuttled to Pearce Ferry (so they didn't get on the bus) and most of the others got a ride straight to the Vegas airport. Instead, John and I took the bus to Harrah's casino where we were spending the night (and we were flying out the next morning).

We got cleaned up back at our hotel, enjoying a 45-minute hot shower each to clean 9 days of grime, sweat, sunscreen and sand from our skin and hair! Walking the strip (what a culture-shock!), we checked out the Mirage, Paris, going up the Eiffel Tower and enjoying the view of the Bellagio fountains from there, and checking out some of the little side-shows along the strip (folks dressed up as Mario & Luigi, seeing a snake-charmer (a little different than our guide

charming the rattlesnake on the Havasu hike!), and staring at the folks showing off their Harley motorcycles and low-rider trucks). Talk about going from one extreme to the other - we had woken up that morning in the peacefulness of Separation canyon and now we were being pelted with noise, traffic, crowds, folks slapping "prostitute cards" and who knows what other sinful behaviors.

In the evening we enjoyed the Beatles Love show at the Mirage (something I've wanted to see for years now) - the acrobatics were excellent and the music was classic! The sound system has thousands of speakers - in fact one on every seat - talk about surround sound! The \$90 tickets were expensive, but worth every penny. And there wasn't anything racy or overtly sinful - the show was good for families, so it was a good way to enjoy Vegas.



*Panoramic view from the Eiffel tower*

Dinner at Paris was relaxed and low-key - we celebrated a wonderful trip and reminisced about our many days on the river. We'll have to start thinking about our next adventure together. I slept for a good many hours that night - my first sleep on a real bed for 9 days!

The next morning we were heading out, flying our Southwest plane back to San Jose. However a glitch in the booking caused one of us to be denied a seat so one of us would have to be re-booked on a later flight. One other passenger was looking for a standby seat, so we volunteered our seat we did have (giving each of us a \$350 free voucher on a future flight with Southwest) and took a flight just 1 hour later. Score - \$700 of free vouchers for 1 hour of waiting in the airport - Southwest is wonderful!

It would take many days to process all the photos and stories from the trip, but we both knew we would have memories to cherish for a lifetime.

In summary, here is where we hiked and rafted –

Da    Lunch spot                      Hike(s)                      Dinner                      Camp                      River

y					Miles
0	Yavapai Point (on the rim)	Along rim	Maswik Lodge cafeteria	Maswik Lodge	
1	Pipe Springs beach (put-in)	Bright Angel Trail	Tuna steaks	Crystal (featured falls and big rapids)	89-98
2	Ross Wheeler	Ross Wheeler boat, granite falls & pool, Shinumo canyon, Elves Chasm	Chicken fillets	Big Dune (featured interesting Tapeatz ledges)	98-119
3	Talking Heads	Deer Creek falls / spring / Throne Room	Filet Mignon	Poncho's Kitchen (featured interesting ledges and caves)	119-137
4	Olo Canyon	Olo falls, Matkatamiba canyon / patio	Chicken burritos	Upper Ledges (featured giant amphitheatres)	137-152
5	Beaver Falls	Havasu canyon to Beaver Falls	Burgers	National (featured beautiful slot canyon)	152-167
6	Tequila beach	Scouting Lava Falls	Pork chops	Lower Whitmore (featured deep canyon and dryfalls)	167-188
7	202 mile beach	Short slot canyon / lava caves	Chicken enchiladas	Pumpkin spring	188-213
8	Travertine grotto	Travertine canyon	Pesto pasta / chicken	Separation canyon (with memorial plaque)	213-240
9	Pearce Ferry (take-out)	Las Vegas strip!	Burgers in Paris	Harrah's ☺	240-279