

Grand Canyon Rafting Adventure

by Diane McKenzie



SCSC – known on the river as Space City Splash Cats...

Before hitting the river, most rafters set off to Las Vegas for a weekend of fun and entertainment, including Kim and Steve Finder from the Los Amigos Ski Club. While the theater was a prime attraction, Mary Ann Harrell and Melanie Morin found endless shopping opportunities. Thanks to Jerry Sadler for making arrangements so everyone could see the "Siegfried and Roy" show. Vegas was hot in more ways than one, and Manolo Valle has melted shoes to prove it.

At 5:30 Tuesday morning, our outfitter, Arizona River Runners, greeted us in the lobby. After taking a scenic flight to Marble Canyon, Arizona, we met our 4 river guides. We had breakfast and orientation, then made a final run to the store for such necessities as beer and wine. Soon, it was on to Lee's Ferry where we began our long awaited journey down the Colorado River.

For 6 days, we traveled 187 miles on two 35-foot inflatable motorized rafts. Scott, our guide, provided daily geology lessons and stories of folklore, soon to be called "Story Time." We looked like children sitting around their teacher with all eyes glued to him! Everyday brought us great rapids with Hermit Rapids being the most fun. We knew we were in for a thrill when the boatmen's smiles were as big as ours were going through a big rapid.

Elaine Sokoloff and Richard Sowrey wore wet suits much of the time and were able to endure the cold, splashing waters best. Bob Tripp and Diane McKenzie tried to keep warm and dry by sitting in the back of the raft. Nora Montgomery's fear of water had her timidly sitting in the back on Day 1, but soon she was up front riding the big rapids with Mike. What a woman!

Our lodging consisted of "luxury waterfront accommodations." After an exciting day of running the rapids, we would pull into a campsite on a sandy beach. Everyone would stake out a campsite, form a "duffle line" and unload the rafts. Once camp was set up, we were on our own for awhile. Most attempted some sort of bath in the frigid 47° river. Others located the private restroom, which gave new meaning to "A Room With A View." Later, we all enjoyed the daily happy hour and snacks.

Each evening we were served a delicious dinner. Kim Finder always helped the chefs. After eating, we would share stories and try to stay awake. The full moon brought us "howling

at the moon" by Kayleen Kill, Vicki Faulkner, Jerry Sadler, and Marsha Lutz. We slept under the stars except when a light rain turned into a fierce sandstorm. The winds were so strong that many in the group, including Joe Walker, Jerry Sadler, and Vicki Faulkner were seen chasing their tents down the beach. This sandstorm also provided each participant with a luxurious, facial dermabrasion.

Each morning we were up at daybreak with the holler of "COFFEE." Breakfast was always great. One morning we were treated to delicious, fresh grilled trout that Mike Montgomery and Walter Hester had caught the evening before.

Each day allowed us to further explore the Canyon via some kind of side hike. These ranged from short walks to steep climbs. One of the favorites was a visit to the Little Colorado River. Its beautiful topaz blue water and 70° temperature warmly welcomed us. One by one we jumped into the river and floated downstream via a fast river current that took us in between many rocks. We wore our lifejackets upside down to protect our bottoms. It was so much fun! Most everyone enjoyed several rides. Nora Montgomery is afraid of water and screamed for help all the way down, but even she was seen doing it again.

Before leaving the Little Colorado, several of us connected together in a train-like fashion for a final run. Ky Griffin was the engine as we headed downstream like an out of control AMTRACK. Kelly McGraw seemed to have more fun here than on the roller coaster ride she took in Vegas.

Deer Creek was another wonderful hiking destination. Here, a beautiful 80' waterfall coming directly out of the canyon greeted us all. This hike was steep and included walking along a very narrow ledge. Suzanne Hegemier decided to sit this one out along with several others. Steve Finder daringly took his tripod and camera equipment along. Ultimately, this hike led us to more waterfalls where Dave Pavlesic, Barb Penkala, Ian Palmer, and many others enjoyed a refreshing swim.

It's tough to choose the best part of being on the river each day. The rapids were always exciting, yet the scenery was always exhilarating. It was easy to stare up at the Canyon walls and soak in its beauty for hours at a time. The geology of the Canyon was simply amazing, yet difficult to fully comprehend. The wildlife was also beautiful. We saw rams with full curl horns, deer, lizards, scorpions, rabbits, blue herons and other creatures. Lynne Hester abandoned her campsite one night after seeing 3 sets of green eyes in the dark. They belonged to ringtail cats.

Sadly, on Day 6 we broke camp for the last time and floated a short distance down river to Whitmore Wash. Here we found our helicopter pad, a sandy area on a beach. We were lifted out of the canyon in a thrilling, helicopter ride and were brought to the rim at the Bar 10 Ranch. Soon, we boarded our chartered plane and said farewell as we took one last scenic view of the Canyon. We headed back to Vegas and eventually on to Texas. Everyone, including our "rafting skeptic" Nora Montgomery, agreed this trip was more than just a great time. It was a fantastic experience!

What was the most fun – white water rafting, hiking, camping, eating? We learned from our guide how to answer that – Yes!

