

Pikes Peak River Runners

**Salt River
April 1-4, 2008**



By Christina King

Photo Credits: Christina King, Keith Fuqua, Nick Olsen, David Peake (Sr & Jr) & Paul Vanderheiden

Trip Participants: Pete & Christina King, Keith Fuqua, Nick Olsen, David Peake (Sr & Jr), Paul Vanderheiden, Jim Wason, and Steve Reed.



After completing our shuttle with TeeJay, we launched on our 4-day Salt River (in Arizona) trip with a medium flow of ~2,700 cfs on April Fool's Day (Apr 1, 2008). The "boys" exit David's shuttle car like Shriner clowns in a parade. It was mighty tight inside their SUV.

I expected the river to rise even more during the next four days, but no luck. Every day we saw the river flow drop a bit and at the takeout four days later it had dropped to ~1,900 cfs. Arizona's White Mountains had a lot of snow this year. Typically, the White Mountain snowpack is below average and the Salt River is not runnable for rafts (or other craft either). We saw several boating friends from



Colorado and Arizona at the put-in and rigged/launched without too much effort. A couple of items of note about this river trip. Since we run this river infrequently, I am not always certain about campsite names and rapid details. We read/run all the rapids (i.e., no scouting) and it seems to work well for the group. Some camps tend to change between seasons due to flash flooding and Tamarisk tree growth which can block sandy beaches. I have found that there are many maps and guides, but none provide the quality and features that reflect high (camps, river miles, side canyons, waterproof, hiking trails, rapid ratings & names, variations at different flows, etc...). The rapids difficulty can change drastically depending on river flows. The temperatures on our trip reached highs in the 70°-80°F's everyday with nightly lows getting quite cold (~40°F's?) considering few of us set up tents every night.

We had a fun group with new and old friends making up our group size of nine boaters and six boats. Our group consists of some old-school boaters, buddies from college and their grown son, sort of new boaters and some that have never run the Salt before. A nice mix but not as diverse as you would think, I am the only girl on the trip.



Our first day on the river, we float the "daily" section and camp on Apache reservation land (river left) below Cibecue and above the last Sandy Point River Access Point (RAP). The rapids today included Bump & Grind, Maytag (only rapid I tend to remember in this section- go RIGHT!), Mother Rock, Overboard and Exhibition and a few smaller rapids. The Salt's version of the commercial boatman's "Sin City" is the Cibecue Creek RAP. This area is dominated by commercial boatmen (includes boatwomen) who have erected relatively "permanent" tent

camp. I think they spend the short ~2-month season basing out of this RAP and run the daily section week after week.

The next day we float by the Apache tribe's sacred Salt Banks- the first of several no-stop areas. We see the first of the numerous Saguaro forested hillsides along with acres of brilliant yellow flowers blooming on every south facing hillside. I vaguely remember Ledges Rapid from previous trips (ledge rock shelf on river left) and run Rat Trap Rapid nicely. I take a poor line in Granite Rapid. I should have run right but instead ran left to right and caught part of the domer hole. I find



that when I screw up running lead, the first few boats behind me tend to follow my poor line (due to their closeness) and it takes a few boats back to react and adjust to a better run. We camp early in Gleason Flat and enjoy a nice very cold swim in the river. Some of our group hikes down the flat (open side canyon).

Note: Somewhere in this section, I ended up choosing a diminishing channel that almost ended in catastrophe for the group. The channel ran out of water, but fortunately, I (and rest of group following me) bailed out via a narrow weed choked side channel with just enough water to float the boats and we escaped a potentially serious boat grounding issue. Whew... I am glad it turned out okay.

Our third day on the river seems like a long one- we are now paying for our two early (relatively low mileage days) and we run most of the big rapids and camp late in the afternoon. Eye of the Needle and Black Rocks Rapids are first up, and we negotiate them easily. The rest of the rapids above Quartzite Falls blend together. We have a tense moment when I get a signal from our group behind me to eddy out just above Quartzite Falls Rapid. As the lead boat, I forcefully jam my boat in the last "micro" eddy above the falls (on the right) and wait for news. I cannot do anything but wait or run the falls by myself. It turns out that one of our group fell behind and dropped out of sight which triggered a quick reaction by everyone to eddy out until we saw him again. At that point, Keith floated around the cliff wall and told me all was okay, and he dropped into Quartzite Falls Rapid along with Pete and Nick ahead of me. We jammed up a bit setting up for Quartzite rapid but either side (left or right) were fine. All of us chose right runs.







Corkscrew rapid had holes and waves but we did okay there too. After a long float to camp somewhere in Horseshoe Bend, Keith and Paul found a splendid camp. The level sugary sand beach provided a delightful respite at the end of a long day. Up until today, we have seen relatively few other river groups and the reason why soon reveals itself. The other groups are all stacked up in this section. Pete enjoys teaching David Peake Jr how to row today (David was a natural).









Our last day is longer than we had originally planned (12 miles vs 8 miles) but we float easily to the takeout by noon. Unfortunately, the takeout is crammed with three other groups (two privates and the ranger). I was able to finally meet, Don Sullivan the USFS river ranger in person, after emailing and talking over the phone with him for years. He had loaded up and removed their 75th "commemorative" tire (i.e., trash) of the season because of the February 2008 monstrous flash flood (90,000 cfs at the takeout). Don Sullivan told me he hopes to simplify the permit process next year by accepting credit cards over the phone and have the permit date match the launch date.

We waited relatively "patiently" while the private group loaded up. The USFS loaded up in a flash once they got a spot to back down their trailers. Finally, we had the ramp to ourselves and loaded up in about an hour or so once we got the space to back down the ramp. All in all, a great trip with nice warm



weather, good water, and new/old friends. We stopped for a tasty late lunch at the Guayos Elrey Cafe restaurant before we scattered for home. Pete and I discovered a wonderful restaurant (La Cocina) in Espanola New Mexico.



Last thoughts: The turtle gets there, slowly but surely...

