

Pikes Peak River Runners

The Grand Wedding Aug 2008 Grand Canyon, Colorado River



By Christina King

Photo Credits: Christina King, Anne Pierce, Patti Meyer, Keith & Ava Fuqua & the Hodge Family (Jeff, Karen & Brendan)

Trip Participants: Our Colorado group consists of 13 friends: Patti Meyer, Dave Wimmer, Dave Sample, Bill & Irene Cooke, Keith & Ava Fuqua, Anne Pierce, The Hodge Family (Jeff, Karen & son Brendan), Pete & Christina (me) King.



This Grand Canyon river trip began with a "Grand Wedding". Patti Meyer and Dave Wimmer met several years ago through our Pikes Peak River Runners club and have joined us on many river trips. What started as a fun series of river trips together ended in a Patti Meyer & Dave Wimmer wedding on this Grand trip. We are so honored that they chose our trip to have their "Grand" wedding. River flows on our trip ranged from 13,000-18,880 cfs. The drive down to Lee's Ferry Arizona took us through some severe hail/rainstorms near Pagosa Springs. On this same day, national news picked up a Havasu Creek flashflood story. National Park Service (NPS) helped with the associated large rescue operation that resulted in everyone getting out safely. [USA Today via The Arizona Republic](#) published an article about private boaters who lost their boats at the mouth of Havasu "creek" today. Our shuttler Canyon REO had rented boats to this group. Read about the details of the rest of this story... at the end of this journal.

We arrived at Lee's Ferry after picking up last minute groceries and solid ice blocks at the Chevron in Page. We rigged our boats in a pelting rainstorm that lasted quite a while which thankfully cooled off the hot ramp. After rigging, we drove back to Marble Canyon Lodge, cleaned up and relaxed by having a group dinner together before going to bed anticipating our next day's launch.



Day 1- Mile 20 Camp, Mon Aug 18, 2008

Dave Chapman, NPS Ranger, checked us out quickly after we coordinated tonight's campsite plans with the other commercial launches. Everyone was pleased with their negotiated campsites (if open) and we launched on a short stretch of clear water to begin our trip. The Paria River slot canyon was spewing chocolate brown water into the Colorado. We immediately experienced our "typical Colorado River August flows and color". I know many boaters appreciate the clear Glen Canyon dam released flows. However, I prefer the more natural brown/red colors delivered by the typical August Arizona monsoons. The day began with clear skies, but

afternoon rains dropped the temperature and drenched us for hours. Okay, maybe we prefer quick storms and clearing skies. Dave Sample managed to successfully spot Brown's Inscription towards the top of the eddy just above Mile 12 on the left. Mid-morning, one of the motor rigs changed their mind and "wanted" North Canyon campsite. We disappointedly agreed to the change of plans (agreed upon at the put-in) and decided to revise our camping plan to Mile 19 camp. Motor rigs travel much quicker than our oar powered rafts and they would reach North Canyon hours ahead of us.



After running House Rock Rapid we were cold and tired. The only commercial group I had not considered was a "disabled" (DSBL) commercial trip run by AZRA (& OAR's?) that had launched the day ahead of us. They had taken two days to get to Mile 19.1 camp and they were at camp when we rounded the bend. This commercial (combination motor/oar rig) trip requires extra time to help their clients (blind, walkers, wheelchairs, paraplegic, etc..) especially when breaking and setting up camp. This group was particularly inspiring to watch them work beyond their physical disabilities, especially in such a tough environment. We will take out with this same group at Diamond in 15 days! We bailed out at a small beach at Mile 20 camp, knowing that all other camps were taken. Our parawing went up quickly and we changed out of soaking clothes as the rain slowed down. We fixed dinner under a clearing evening and slept under Bill & Irene's futuristic silver tripod shelter. The first day is always long and tiring until we get into a groove.

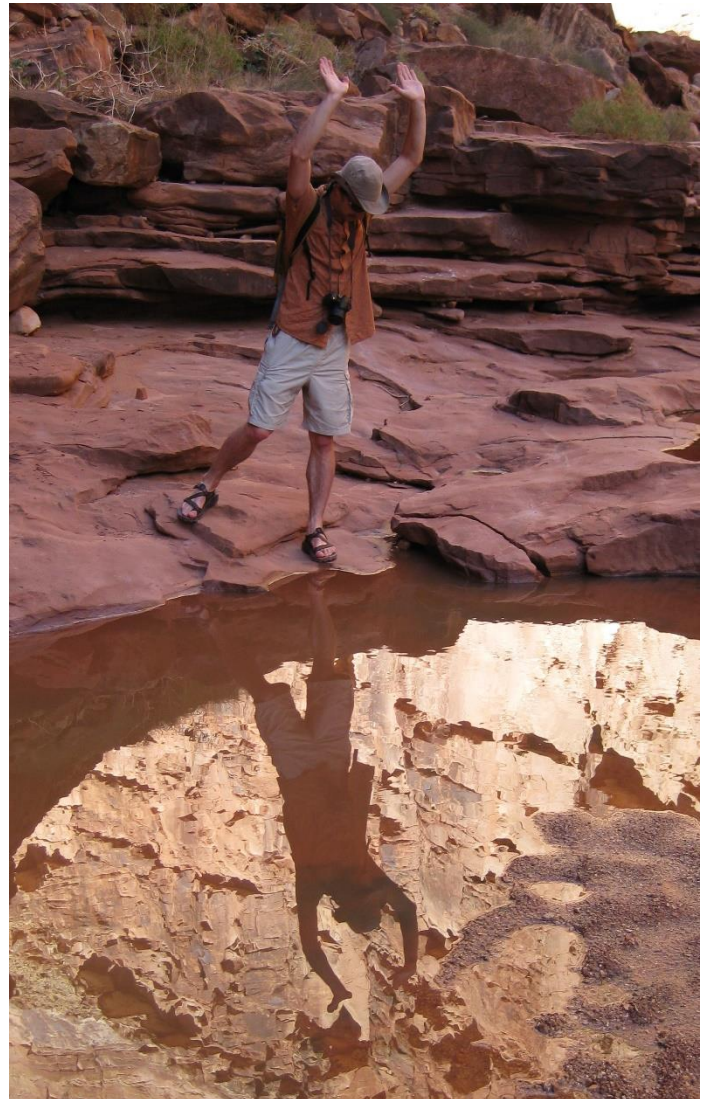


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Day 2- Wedding Celebration at South Canyon Camp, Tues Aug 19, 2008

We wake to a clear morning anticipating a fun run down river (wedding day & evening). Our wedding planners extraordinaire (Karen Hodge & Irene Cooke) had perfectly planned the wedding event. Our first stop is a side hike at North Canyon, followed by the Roaring 20's series of rapids (no scouts- we all ran them well). Cave Spring "cave" looked cold and muddy, so we bypassed it with a lunch warm-up at Silver Grotto.

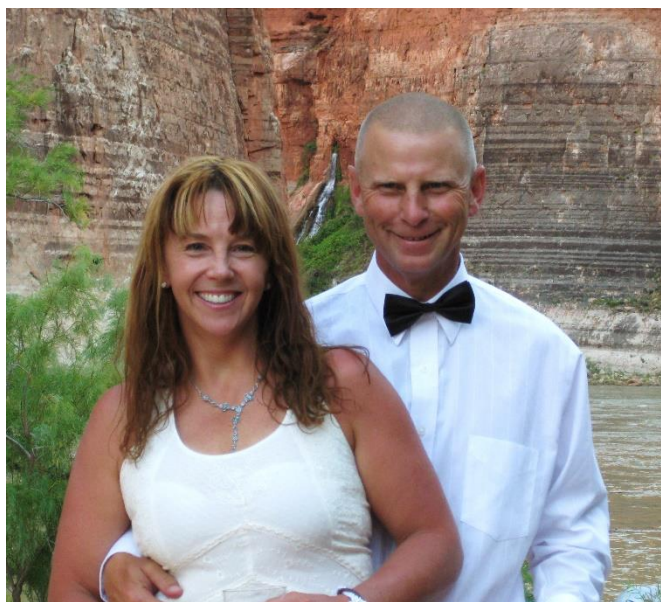
By the time we ate lunch, Silver Grotto tempted some of our group to slither, slide and scamper up and down the slick limestone walls.



At this point, our early launch pattern positioned us for an empty camp at South Canyon. A more perfect wedding site could not have been found. Patti enjoyed pampering while others set up the wedding venue (& decorations) and wedding feast (Keith Fuqua- executive chef). Our wedding planners transformed our river camp into an elegant outdoor wedding venue. Patti Meyer appeared serene and beautiful in her flowing white dress. Dave Wimmer looked as bashful as a teenager in his "dress" shorts, formal white shirt, and tidy bow tie. Suddenly, my clean shorts and shirt did not seem dressed up

enough for the event. Irene played her master of ceremonies officiating role perfectly with contributions from most of our group. Bubbles were the sendoff as we sat down to the Keith's wedding feast complete with a wedding cake (baked & frozen in Colorado Springs). The evening was magical for all of us with each of us

getting a fun wedding goodie bag (including a Lexan wine glass) from Patti/Dave. Anne made a great catch to snag the wedding bouquet and fastened it to the bow of her boat for the rest of the trip. We went to bed stuffed and content.



P.S. Karen's daughter Allison is getting married a few days after we get off the river on Sept 1, so Karen has had plenty of wedding planner practice in advance of Patti and Dave's event. It shows as the wedding ceremony went off without a hitch.

Day 3- Nankoweep Camp, Wed Aug 20, 2008

We got a slow start this post-wedding morning, taking our time by walking up to the Anasazi ruins and Indiana Jones cave before launching. Another stop at Vasey's Paradise waterfall, then onto Redwall Cavern for a game of Bocce Ball at the expansive sand beach. We put up lunch umbrella's at Nautiloid Canyon while some of the group hiked up to see the fossils. I remain opposed to visiting the exact place where I broke my leg in 2004 and stayed under the shade umbrella at lunch. The day quickly got hot, and we endured a difficult day rowing against the wind in the afternoon to make it to our



planned camp. Due to our late start, we did not have time to hike at Saddle Canyon and make it down to our intended Nankoweep camp. We will start earlier next year. Another private group already had the prime Nankoweep camp, so we pulled up short at the middle Nankoweep camp- a poor beach after the high flows of last March that have removed most of the beach sand. This other private group launched several days ahead of us and have planned a lot of layover days (taking 8 days to Phantom). They ran up from their camp to enthusiastically greet us before we even had time to de-rig. We do not know any of them but they sure are friendly. They will also take out with us on Sept 1 at Diamond Creek. We have camped here before, but little is left of the previous year's beach. Last Spring's high flows rearranged the sand at many beaches but mainly left a lot of high cut sandbanks. I am sure the motor rigs love this, but I think it is inconvenient for our much lower and smaller rafts. It will likely return to a "natural" sandbank balance in a year or so. The NPS touts every high-water release as a successful plan to mimic historic flows (and put sand back on the riverbanks). Alternatively, I notice that the Grand Canyon river corridor ecosystem reaches its own balance by redistributing sand back to the riverbed relatively quickly. The NPS releases are a short-term experiment that seems to generate the same results every cycle.

Day 4- Rattlesnake Camp, Thu Aug 21, 2008

A few in our group enjoyed an early morning hike up to the Anasazi granaries before we left camp. A few miles downriver, the Little Colorado River is brown and muddy, so we do not linger. The Little Colorado River tributary can be turquoise in non-rainy months but we have not seen it clear in years since we mostly run the Grand Canyon in August. We have lunch under a sliver of shade above Tanner Rapid and the Birthing Rock chair. Not everyone heeds my warning to miss the hole in Tanner and some have more exciting runs in Tanner rapid than others, but all upright.

Unkar is hot as Hades so only a couple of us go up to look at the Anasazi ruins and pottery shards. We run Unkar Rapid and float to camp at Rattlesnake. Anne brought a fun toy (an Ultraviolet - UV- light) to search for glow in the dark scorpions after the sun goes down. The UV light makes the scorpions pop out like a glow in the dark beacon! The photos below were not enhanced with Photoshop, the scorpion really looked like this. This gives me a different perspective when sleeping directly on the ground. Cots are much nicer.



UV light vs regular flashlight

Day 5- Mile 91 Camp, Fri Aug 22, 2008

We have a lot of rapids today and it continues to be hot. So hot that it peaks at 126°F at Phantom Ranch Canyon (NPS ranger station & hiking trail). Hance Rapid was rocky but the left side was open. I snuck the monstrous holes at Sockdolager and Grapevine rapids but safely rode the big waves down each rapid. Putting our lunch table directly into the river, helps greatly with micro-trash crumbs and cooling off while eating.

We stopped to hike up Clear Creek- most of the group went up to the falls but I stayed under the umbrella in the shade, avoiding the blistering black hot rocks. While we filled up our water jugs at Phantom Canyon, a foreign hiker experienced severe heat cramps but fortunately a NPS ranger rendered him first aid. That heat exhausted Spanish hiker spent an unplanned night at the bottom of the Grand Canyon that I know he will never forget. We pushed off for a scout at Horn Creek Rapid.



The left slot at Horn Creek was open and most of us ran that side with no problem. Patti & Dave chose the right to left route (did not clear it completely). Their run looked awkward and intimidating but they popped out upright. We pull into the steep beach at Mile 91 camp thankful to find an unoccupied place to camp tonight. We have enjoyed the river almost all to ourselves since we launched. Our schedule has taken us out of most other commercial and private boat trip schedules.





Day 6- Bass Camp, Sat Aug 23, 2008

We begin our day with exciting runs at Granite rapid that provide a quick morning wakeup splash. Yippee, the left side of Granite rapid is open, so I take it and miss the monster waves/wall along the right-side wall. I have not run it left in several years, so I enjoyed the ride on this “smaller” side (it is still big).









We scouted Hermit rapid next, and I snuck so far left that I did not even get wet. Bill/Irene Cooke and Anne Pierce went down the middle and got spit out left. Their runs looked huge, the monster hole/crashing wave at # 8 wave in this series was very intimidating. Even the big motor rigs who ran ahead of us made this rapid look big.



A stop to scout Crystal rapid reinforced our choice to run our typical far right sneak. Patti really took our right sneak to heart and slopped over rocks on the right side. A lunch break below Crystal Rapid and then onto the "Gem" rapids which proved to be straightforward. However, we all remained wary of Dave Sample's nemesis - Ruby Rapid - which was the site of his flip a few river trips ago. Bass camp was wide open and so we pulled in and camped. Camp was scorching, with rain threatening but no cool off.



Day 7- Big Dune Camp, Sun Aug 24, 2008

Bill/Irene prepared a tasty eggs benedict breakfast before the heat and humidity cranked up to drive us out of camp. The Shinumo Creek waterfall was delightfully cool and washed away our sweat. Waltenberg rapid was the only rapid of consequence today, no problem. A stop at Elves Chasm waterfall and then we floated to an early camp at Big Dune. We have had the river corridor to ourselves since Nankowep (other than hikers at Phantom Ranch). After a game of dominoes and attack frisbee we enjoyed a grilled salmon dinner capped off with brownies. Dave Sample and Anne Pierce are very skilled in the attack frisbee game and demonstrated excellent strategy to win their matches. Pete and Bill did some crazy acrobatics to withstand their onslaught.



Day 8- Stone Creek Camp, Mon Aug 25, 2008

Blacktail Canyon had great photographic lighting today and we meandered up the canyon savoring the quietness of each overhanging ledge wall. Specter rapid was intimidating and I got knocked around midway through the rapid. I managed to lose my grip on my oar but rebounded to my seat and oar grip by the bottom of the rapid. During our scout of Bedrock rapid some of our group clambered into the Doll House rock formation. We noticed a strong smoke smell at Bedrock rapid and eventually found out that a South Rim control burn had escaped containment. We all ran right at Bedrock rapid and rowed hard against the wind toward Deubendorff rapid. The high wind kept messing up my set up and pushed me around at the top of "Dubie". I finally dropped into the rapid correctly and ran it fine. Stone Creek camp was empty, so we pulled into camp.

Day 9- Panchos Camp, Tue Aug 26, 2008

Before we went to bed last night, Pete and I shifted our boats down the beach to a deeper boat berth. In addition, I use a lead mushroom anchor to hold the boats in the deeper water while the water drops overnight. I only use the lead anchor on sandy sections of river bottom because it can get permanently stuck on rocky sections. Turns out it was a good plan because this morning, several boats in our group were high and dry after the dam released water was reduced overnight.

After we push off downriver, we fill up drinking water at Tapeats Creek (treat it with bleach) and make a short bat guano sniffing stop at Christmas Tree cave. The group selected to hike Deer Creek this year, so we spent many hours here today. The Deer Creek drainage has recovered significantly from [last year's flash flooding event](#) and we all enjoyed ourselves at this special waterfall. We camp early at Pancho's camp beach.



Day 10- Ledges Camp, Wed Aug 27, 2008

Half of our group left camp at 5:30 am to hike up Kanab while the rest of us enjoyed a leisurely breakfast and float to Matkatamiba Canyon. We did not scout Upset Rapid and most of us had poor runs (not getting far enough right). Only Pete and Keith managed to nail the left to right downstream ferry pull avoiding the big hole at the bottom. I always make the pull right and this year failed to do that, instead ran just left of the hole but luckily popped out right side up. The rest of our group had similar runs to mine, so I do not feel that off my game. Nonetheless, next year, I will work harder to

get my angle right! We camped at Pete's favorite Grand Canyon camp called Ledges - whose name describes this camp fittingly.

Day 11- National Camp, Thu Aug 28, 2008

Havasu Creek is our first stop, and we were interested to see the flash flood damage reported by news agencies the day before we started this trip. Sure enough, the water was milky (instead of clear) and the hiking trail looked very torn up. In fact, just after we had started up the trail, a NPS helicopter landed on the rock ledges. NPS dropped off two rangers to reconnoiter the trail after the damage. We also noted that all motor rigs bypassed Havasu Creek. It turns out that the motor rigs were not stopping at Havasu at all due to a confirmed client report of staph infection illness. After our trip, I find no mention of water quality issues at Havasu but do not doubt that water quality is compromised. All motor rigs are choosing to stop and hike at National canyon camp rather than spend any time at Havasu Creek. Pete and I scrubbed up well in National camp that night. FYI: Lower National camp is a poor camp (extremely narrow high cut bank sliver of beach). However, the old National camp (where Oracle rock is) has shifted down to a nicer beach just a bit below the original beach. If the water is touching the base of Oracle rock at National on the morning that you launch from camp, the left side of Lava Falls rapid is open.

Day 12- Whitmore Wash Camp, Lava Falls Rapid day, Fri Aug 29, 2008

Our group was up at the crack of dawn, hustling to get out of camp and down to Lava Falls Rapid. As we left camp, Oracle Rock had water touching the base so the left side of Lava should be open (it proved to be true). We scouted Lava on the left.

Another private group that had camped above Lava Falls and also ran the left side. We appreciated watching their successful runs. A commercial oar group caught up with us on our scout and they took turns running with us (them on the right, us on the left). I ran first and ran an okay (but big hit) left run. The first hole on the left stood my boat up on end and knocked me briefly off my seat. Everyone in our group ran Lava Falls successfully and upright with varying degrees of grace (and on the left). We saw no flips on our Lava Falls rapid day.



Check out Anne Pierce's videos of our Lava Falls rapid runs on You Tube:

- [Lava Falls - Christina King & Keith/Ava Fuqua & Dave Sample/Brendan Hodge](#)
- [Lava Falls - Bill & Irene Cooke](#)
- [Lava Falls - Patti Meyer & Dave Wimmer](#)
- [Lava Falls - Jeff & Karen Hodge](#)
- [Lava Falls - Pete King](#)

We floated leisurely down to Whitmore Wash camp and spent the afternoon sweating under our shade umbrella's.



Day 13- Mile 202 Camp, Sat Aug 30, 2008

We planned a short day today but experienced the most intense storm I have run into on any river. Here is [video from this storm documented by another private boater group](#) many miles upriver from us at Redwall Cavern. In fact, this same storm washed out the Diamond Creek road several miles below us today (for several days). The hurricane force winds blew us into shore where we hunkered down trying to protect ourselves from the pelting hail and rain. At times, I thought the winds might catch the lower portion of my raft tubes and flip me over in completely flat water. After the wind lessened, we arrived shivering and dripping wet into mile 202 camp. We set up a sheltering tarp and waited the rain out. It finally quit raining after a bit and the sky cleared during dinner. We were able to climb up to the pictographs near camp while Dave and Patti prepared dinner. On the way back from our walk up to the pictographs, Ava almost stepped on a Grand Canyon Pink rattlesnake. Four AM sprinkles drove us under our group parawing with our cots in tow. In our haste to move under cover, Pete forgot to shake out his crocs and stepped on a scorpion. That sting lasted for days and even swelled up to a big bump on his foot.



Day 14- Mile 224 Camp, Sun Aug 18, 2008

The morning dawned with a 6 AM downpour with accompanying heavy cloud cover. We packed up in the splattering rain and left camp early. It rained for hours and we were treated to dozens of spontaneous waterfalls pouring over cliffs hundreds of feet high. The thunder, lightning and grinding of boulders pouring over the red cliffs was spectacular. Every river bend spewed out dramatic waterfalls and we could not believe our good fortune to witness the pourovers. The lighting was not great for photography, but my eyes and ears will not forget the magnificent sights and sounds we heard that day. During events like this, I prefer to be on the river. It feels safer as compared to the narrow slot canyons on rivers edge. Our favorite month to run the Grand Canyon is August due to the monsoon storms that can create these spectacular scenes, but this topped any previous storm events we have seen in the river corridor. We did not stop at usual places (Indian Canyon, Three Springs, Womb Rock, Pumpkin Springs, Jump Rock, etc...) because of the cascading rain torrents and very cool temperatures. The sun finally came out at Mile 220 camp where we stopped for lunch. We decided to continue and try a new camp for us at Mile 224. The commercial DSBL trip caught up with us and camped just below us because they also planned to take out at Diamond Creek the next day. They reported that they had called their warehouse manager who told them that the Diamond Creek road was closed today and to call back at 6 pm for an updated report. We guessed as much and used our satellite phone to leave a message for Donnie Dove saying we planned to come in at Diamond tomorrow. Not much else to do but check out the situation tomorrow. Karen is anxious that she might not return in time for her daughter's wedding on Friday. I jokingly mention that calling in a NPS search and rescue helicopter evacuation to ensure that she arrives at her daughter's wedding in time probably will not work as an excuse for emergency evacuation. We have extra food/supplies but most of us also have commitments to get back to work. Patti and Dave planned to continue down to South Cove and enjoy an end of trip private honeymoon. They offer to help us out if we need to and we are grateful for their offer of support.

Day 15- Takeout at Diamond Creek, Mon Sep 1, 2008

Relief washed over all of us as we rounded the last bend before the takeout and spied a chaos filled scene of [Hualapai](#) outfitter activity. The road was open! The Hualapai waved us in (one by one) and we finished de-rigging in record time as Donnie Dove pulled up in van/truck/trailer shuttle rigs. We waved goodbye to Dave and Patti as they floated through the rapid just below the takeout to enjoy their well-deserved private honeymoon. The Diamond Creek road was bad and required that we give our van a short shove through sifting sand to make it out, but we have seen it worse on previous trips. Hualapai are hard at work in their D-9's and road graders were working on the road as we drove through the creek to leave the canyon. The traditional stop at Delgadillo's provided lunch and then a sweaty unloading session in Flagstaff ended our trip. We slept soundly that night, drove back to Colorado the next day and returned to "work". Rowing 225 miles down the Colorado River rapids might seem like work to many people but not to me.



The Rest of the Havasu Flashflood Story...as related to me directly from Donnie Dove owner of Canyon REO.

The private boaters tied up their five Canyon REO rental rafts on two separate anchor points in Havasu Canyon on Saturday, Aug 16, 2008 as many boaters do when they plan to hike up Havasu Canyon. Thankfully, the private boaters were not caught in Havasu Creek when the flashflood tore the d-rings off their boats and pushed the rafts out into the Colorado River. The anchors (and stripped d-rings) stayed in place in Havasu. The private boaters were helicoptered out of the canyon without any of their gear. One boat was found five miles down in a nice quiet eddy and towed out by NPS staff. NPS ghost-boated this empty raft through Lava Falls rapid (it flipped). NPS re-righted this single raft and continued down river towing the boat. NPS collected the remaining four rafts that had been retrieved twice by commercial outfitters at Mile 205. Yes, that is right, the empty rafts ran Lava not even losing unsecured maps, lifejackets, and other gear on the boats. Obviously on autopilot. How did the four boats get loose after being found once at ~Mile 205? Outfitters had pulled them up on shore but had not tied them off. Overnight, more flash-flooding occurred (~4,000-5,000 additional cfs in river) and the boats floated free once more. Another commercial outfitter discovered them floating again and securely tied them up on shore to be later towed out by NPS to Diamond Creek. This relatively happy ending could have turned out so differently, it is amazing that no one was hurt or killed during this major weather event.

Havasu Creek Flash Flood links:

- [Havasu Flashflood video](#)
- [Havasu Flashflood video](#)
- [More Havasu Flashflood video](#)

