

Pikes Peak River Runners

Wanna Go on The Grand..." Well Sure" August 2010 Grand Canyon, Colorado River



By Christina King

Photo Credits: Christina King, Patti Meyer (the most creative one), Eric Griffin & the Irish Kayaker

August 29-Sep 12, 2010

Trip Participants (11): Christina King (permit holder/trip lead), Keith/Ava Fuqua, Oskar Ånnegård (flew in from Sweden), Mike Sims, Melissa Broch, Karl Wolf, Eric Griffin, Sue Demars, Dave Wimmer and Patti Meyer. Seven boats, one ducky and a great group to boat with!

I had been hoping to join a Grand trip in August 2010 but only had a narrow window of time available between a trip to Sweden in July/early Aug and a trip to Morocco in October. Considering that the Grand trip is 15 days (280 miles) it was a hard trip to fit in. Fortunately, I picked up an Aug 29, 2010 (16) person permit cancellation in mid-July 2010 through the NPS weighted lottery and quickly contacted our usual circle of suspects to see who could join our group. BTW- I noticed my weighted lottery chances were only 1 (very low compared to other lucky winners) and was very pleased to come up with



this prime date. Our final group consisted of 11 boaters (one late addition from Sweden) and the planning commenced. We decided to try the new Pearce Ferry takeout but keep the trip to 15 days max (remember I was conserving vacation for all the rest of my trips from this year). We did the usual planning and soon had all group gear accounted for, shuttle set, logistics and food planning done, etc.... Fuqua's, Oskar, and I carpooled down to Pagosa Hot springs and enjoyed a relaxing evening soaking in the Lobster Pot before arriving at Lee's Ferry the next day to rig boats that Saturday afternoon. Rigging was done in a couple of hours of windy weather (which made me uneasy), and we retired to Marble Canyon Lodge to have dinner, settle trip finances

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and last-minute details. The trip cost (for all expenses; permit fees, toilet rental, group supplies, shuttle, food, etc....) turned out to be \$627/person. It was nice to skip the hassle of dealing with the fees at Diamond this year which lowered the trip cost for everyone.

Oskar's English is particularly good, and he delights in imitating a suave "well for sure" American accent whenever possible. It becomes a goofy saying we all repeat. Oskar joined our trip after I spent a day sea kayaking with his father and him just a few weeks ago in Sweden. I asked if one of them might be interested in joining our trip since we had an open spot and Oskar jumped on the chance.

Day 1 (Aug 29, 2010), Hot Na Na (~16 miles): 17,000 cfs

The morning dawned with a brisk upstream breeze that only grew in strength all day long. It was a difficult row down to camp for everyone including the commercial dory group behind us that did not even make it as far as we did. Paria River added a bit of sediment to the river but it remained somewhat clear. Patti spotted some condors high in the sky above Navajo Bridge. Oskar ran my ducky with ease and the rest of the group had no problems in the rapids today. Fun waves in Soap Creek rapid. All of us had hot spots on our hands from the hard rowing today. The wind never let up that night. Despite the wind, the group had the energy to play river washers that night in camp.

Day 2 (Aug 30, 2010), South Canyon (~12 miles): 17,000 cfs

We scouted House Rock Rapid first thing this morning. It was an easy downstream ferry pull to the right at low flows. The wind seemed to diminish all day, but the morning started out windy. We have an early morning group that rises by ~5:30 am and launches by 8 am (or earlier) every day. We stopped at North Canyon and hiked up the draw in the heat. The Roaring 20's rapids welcomed us to our next series of rapids. 24.5 mile rapid sported a big hole/wave all the way across river. I had to hit it straight to stay on course.

We spelunked and had lunch below Cave Springs rapid and then a portion of our group rope climbed up Silver Grotto. No dead bats in the water this year. Because of the high



winds during the past 3 days, private and commercial groups are out of sync and we began to stack up. After talking to everyone we figured South Canyon was open and went down to camp. When we arrived at South Canyon a commercial GCE motor rig (that we had already talked to about South- and had not planned to camp there) had been forced to hang back once he realized all the camps below were taken. Since we had already talked, he knew we were coming down and graciously invited us to share the camp with his group. He had set up camp down below (where they usually park their motor rigs in deeper water), and we shifted to the canyon portion (upper part of camp). Very amicable and everyone was happy. Keith gave me a solar lantern as an early birthday gift, and I set it up on my boat where it lit up like a dim UFO all night. Patti's boat made a lazy dash for freedom during the night when Dave and I spied its line tangled up in the driftwood heading down to the motor rig. Patti's grande roja gato is almost as big as a motor rig and it must have gone to see a mate more its size during its night escapade. We tied off Patti's boat and shared the funny tale of the lonesome boat with the motor rig group that next morning. South Canyon is one of my favorite campsites. It has so many special qualities such as the Indiana Jones cave, Anasazi ruins, priceless views up and down canyon with the topper being a bird's eye view of Vasey's Paradise waterfall and the site of Dave and Patti's wedding a few years ago. Only thing missing were the ringtails tonight, ravens flew in on cue in the morning at all our camps.



Day 3 (Aug 31, 2010), Saddle Canyon (~15 miles): 16,000 cfs

We stopped at Vasey's Paradise waterfall for photos, Redwall Cavern for Hungarian Horseshoes (a Montana game) and hunted for fossils at Nautiloid Canyon and lunch. We were late getting into Saddle Canyon camp due to the wind again but still managed to hike up to the falls and back before dinner.



Day 4 (Sep 1, 2010), Nevills (~29 miles): 16,000 cfs

Long day today but great fun. Fast hike up to Nankoweep Anasazi Granaries but at least no wind today. It got hot. Little Colorado River was muddy, so we did not bother to tie up and walk into this tributary. Our somewhat clear water is completely gone for the rest of our trip. We trudged up to the Birthing Chair petroglyphs above Tanner rapid and then ran the rapid. Ava rowed Patti's boat and did great. Oskar ran the Tanner hole and swam. He is quick to self-rescue which becomes a much used and valuable skill for the rest of the trip. He is fearless in the rapids and loves to ducky every hole he can find. Typical Swede, not a dab of sunscreen worn the entire trip, rarely wore shoes or shirt and never wore a hat. Ava and I would have been burned silly if we tried that strategy but at least we hopefully will not ever get skin cancer! Oskar ran too far left and did a dance with the wall at Unkar. The rest of us were too tired/hot to hike up to the Unkar ruins as we still had a bit to go before camp. We were aiming for Rattlesnake camp but caught up with a private group we had not seen yet that already had it. Nevills was open so we took that camp instead. We are set up to enter the inner gorge tomorrow and excited to begin running the big rapids.

Day 5 (Sep 2, 2010), 91-mile camp (~16 miles): 8,100 cfs steady flow

Flows dropped today to the forecasted steady low flow program and remain at 8,100 cfs for the remainder of our trip. Awoke to cool temps that quickly gave way to extremely hot temps later in the day. Our first major rapid of the day was Hance. It was low water and rocky. I can only imagine how the dories and motor rigs must fear this rapid at low water. It deserves its severe rating at these flow levels. We all entered right, shifted to the "duck pond" area to slow ourselves down. Our goal was to precisely launch ourselves into the middle of the maelstrom at the bottom half of the rapid trying to avoid the monster "land of the giants" holes along the



way. Great runs by all. Next up was Sockdolager- I snuck the huge entry hole but Oskar did not and swam (virtually the entire rapid). He swam the next Mile 83 rapid also. Oskar was tired at this point but gamely got back in his ducky and paddled on. Oskar took a break from swimming and snuck the hole in Grapevine along with the rest of us. We stacked all 7 of our rafts up the mouth of Clear Creek and hiked up to the waterfall. Clear Creek was pleasantly warm and clear this year.



Our next stop was to fill up water at Phantom Ranch and we plod up to the ranch to collect/send “ass” mail and buy an ice-cold lemonade. FYI: Mules (aka jackasses) carry all the mail and goods in and out of Phantom Ranch. Both wheelbarrows were broken at the water pump but at least we did not have to carry our water jugs as far as we used to. The temperature in the sun was 130°F and in the shade was 103°F. We all commented that this trip seemed cooler than most but maybe our personal thermometers are off. Either that or the Phantom Ranch thermometers are not calibrated, I had guessed 95°F tops.

Our last major rapid of the day was Horn Creek. It was nasty at this level BUT the horns were “splittable”. Dave ran right to left and hit big holes, the rest of us had the “easy” run down the horn splits. For a moment, Patti lost track of her line drop but Keith nudged her down the right path with a little encouragement. I hit the hole hard between the horns and it jerked me off my seat, but it was the line to take at this level. Oskar ran right and swam. He emerged far from his ducky and scrambled up a rock wall on the left after getting a long underwater dunk. I picked Oskar and his paddle up and Dave got his ducky. 91-mile camp looked nice, so we took that rather than pushing down to Trinity. We seem to have left the other clustered “out of sync” groups behind us.

Day 6 (Sep 3, 2010), Ross Wheeler camp (~17 miles): 8,100 cfs steady flow

First up today is Granite Rapid- we all made zippy runs down the right side. What a rush!









Hermit had no left sneak (blocked by a hole), so we all ran down the middle. Waves were relatively small at these flows.





Next up was Crystal rapid- easy sneak on the right. Only Dave, Patti and Oskar ran left. Even then the two channels around the rock island were more challenging than the rapid itself due to huge pour-over holes. A lot of boaters in our group had unplanned exciting runs in this portion of the rapid. The remaining Gem rapids are harder at lower flows with narrower tongues and larger/sharper lateral waves. Melissa gouged her knees into her dry box in Ruby rapid. Serpentine was tricky. Karl's little SpongeBob inflatable holds firm through the big rapids of the Inner Gorge with his one arm (Powell-like) on the back of his boat.



Our group has really become a cohesive team and we work well together. We have a great time joking, singing portions of songs because we cannot remember an entire verse of any single song, teasing Eric and Karl about their love shack/cot nest, getting on the river early and cramming in as many activities as possible throughout the day and have become an efficient team.

Some of our trip quotes listed below:

- *"Well Sure"*
- *"For Sure"*
- *"You know this is an old person's trip when all the crackers have All Bran in the label."*
- *"How long before it is 8 pm, so we can go to bed?"*
- *"Love shack, love shack"*
- *"Tin Roof- Rusted!"*
- *"There is no 'R' in Shit, rrrrrrr"*
- *"It is all fun and games until someone gets hurt... and then it is hilarious."*
- *"May I have a Frosty, please?"*
- *"Cubbie's over"*

We shared Ross Wheeler camp with a couple of backpackers who genuinely appreciated our offerings of food, beer, and water re-supply. Melissa shares her Body Shop Satsuma Love butter with me. I am instantly hooked on the citrus scent of Satsuma Love butter. Our hands and feet soak in this smooth cream that soothes the hot spots and softens my sandpaper skin. I make Keith a \$1 Billion dollar bet (and Dave backs me up) that Bass camp is just below us on the right. Well... my eyes must be failing me because technically, Bass is below the turn – not the one we see from Ross Wheeler. Keith lords it over me and cannot wait to get back to tell Pete that I goofed up. I will never live this one down.



Day 7 (Sep 4, 2010), Upper Blacktail camp (~11 miles): 8,100 cfs steady flow

We pass by my non-\$1B Bass camp and quickly pull into Shinumo creek waterfall where I try to wash away my hasty bet. I wonder if Dave can really cover my bet....? Waltenberg rapid was tricky at this level and Oskar swims again. I run center, shift slightly to the left to narrowly avoid monster holes. Elves Chasm was enchanting as always. We camp early at Blacktail Canyon and hang out in the shady ledges of this beautiful canyon to escape the heat of the day. Dave and Oskar climbed up and around for several hours while we enjoyed the shade. We come back to the canyon after dark. We sing songs as bug eating bats flit past our heads. Mike does an amazing rendition of Amazing Grace on his harmonica. I wish he had space for his guitar on this trip.

Day 8 (Sep 5, 2010), Racetrack camp (~13 miles): 8,100 cfs steady flow

We decided to scout Specter rapid (did not need to) and all ran it well. It is the same straight shot down the right side at all levels. We also scouted Bedrock to include a look at the

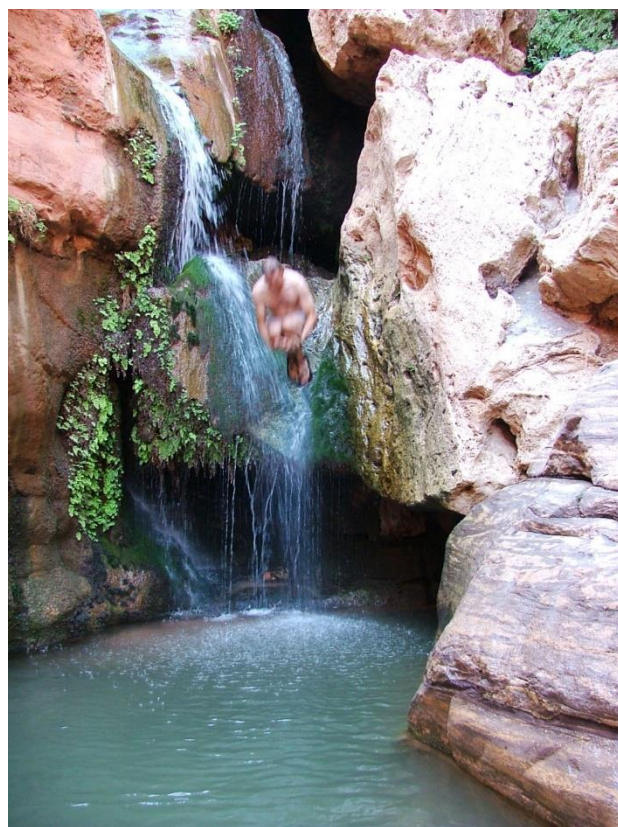


Dollhouse. Keith's

hand was literally 6 inches away from a rattlesnake as he tied up his boat at Bedrock. No rattle warning or movement by the snake until we were ready to untie his boat. Another private group was also scouting Bedrock and we watched Oskar run it both right and left side just because he wanted to. He dragged the ducky back up to run it again on the left side of the Bedrock to make it more challenging.

Our last scout was Deubendorff- glad we did. It was difficult to see the line and it helped our entire group run it well (or so I thought). I only noticed afterwards in the pictures that the Irish kayakers took of our group that Dave Wimmer had a spectacular run down through the holes.

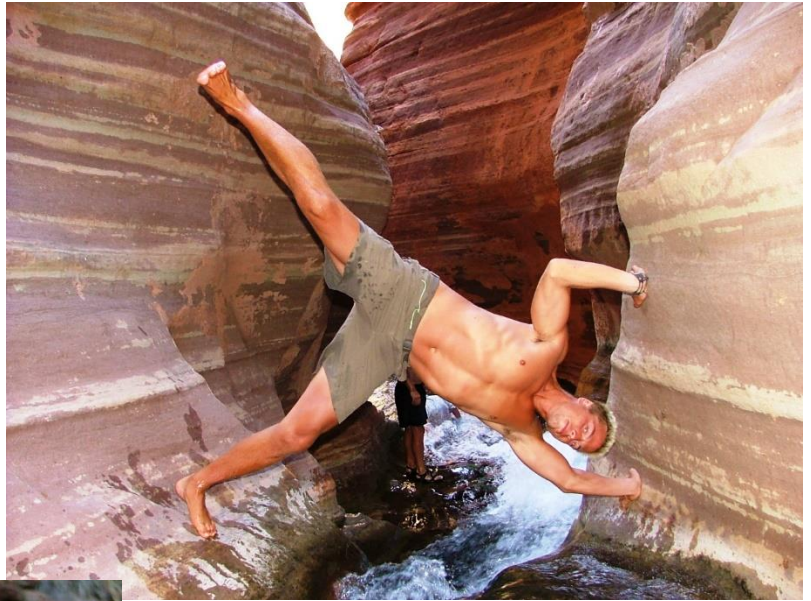
Unfortunately, a private charter motor rig/kayak group had laid over at Stone Creek camp. This is why I do not encourage layovers. It messes up the group behind you and can be perceived as selfish (and most of the time unintentional) to use a prime camp for two nights in a row. The Irish group was super friendly, and they took pictures of our runs, so it was not that bad. Plus, we hiked up to enjoy the Stone Creek waterfall. Afterwards we scooted down to Racetrack to bake in the sun. In the later afternoon, part of our group hiked up and over to Tapeats to enjoy



this creek. Keith outdid himself by pulling out a divine chocolate/raspberry filling cake for Sue and my birthdays (Sept 6/7). It was delicious.

Day 9 (Sep 6, 2010), Pancho's camp (~5 miles): 8,100 cfs steady flow

Our loop hikers left at 5:30 am (Dave, Oskar and Mike) while the rest of us filled up water at Tapeats and then went down to Deer Creek for an afternoon of leisure. Most of us went up to the Throne room but the loop speed hikers were so quick they met us as we arrived at Deer Creek. It was a perfect birthday. We enjoyed a festive dinner with Patti dressing us girls in skirts and tops. I gave everyone in the group my gift to them - Korean spa face masks-men included this year. They groaned but I am convinced they liked the tingly face masks on their hot and sweaty faces.







Day 10 (Sep 7, 2010), Matkatamiba Hotel camp (~12 miles): 8,100 cfs steady flow

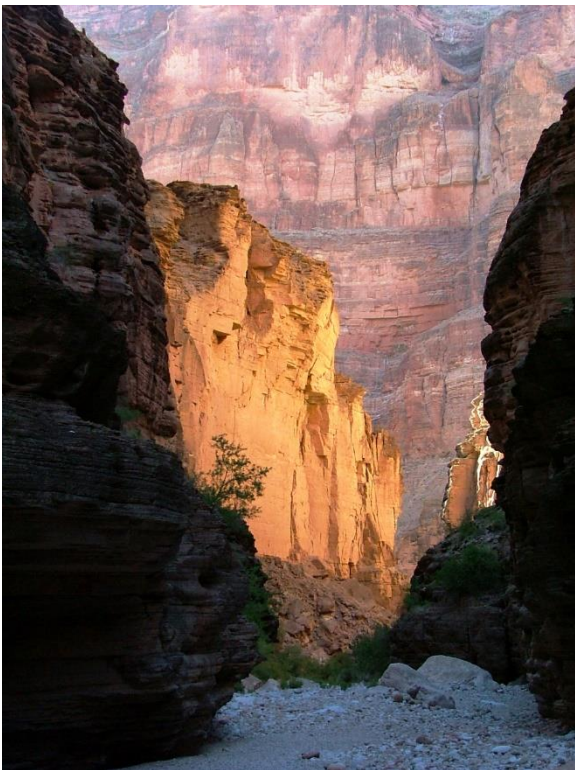
Awoke to wind, cloudy skies and concerns about rain coming down canyon. For safety, we decided to camp at Matkat, give time for storms to settle down, hike back up to Matkat canyon from camp after threat of rain had passed. Good strategy. Glad we had overhangs to get away from splattering raindrops. Played cards, read, and spent the rainy portion of the afternoon under our overhangs. Storm passed, rain quit, skies cleared to allow hikers to go back up to Matkat canyon.



Day 11 (Sep 8, 2010), Upper National Canyon camp (~18 miles): 8,100 cfs steady flow

Scouted and run Upset rapid easily on the right, Dave chooses a bigger left run but all okay. While scouting Upset rapid a lathered Bighorn Sheep ram was all over two ewes in heat at the mouth of this canyon. For a moment we thought he might spar with us to keep us at bay, but we managed to make our way back to the boats. Keith and I lounged on boats at the mouth of Havasu Creek while others spent a few hours up top. Six commercial motor rigs, one commercial (Oars) group, another private and us made Havasu Canyon (Havazoo) earn its nickname today. The creek was cloudy with silt today. Unfortunately, Oskar lost his camera (strap broke) in Havasu creek and never found it. Mike's camera battery will not charge, and Fuqua's end up losing

their camera to a raven at camp while we were hiking. Not a camera-lucky trip. We rowed against a hard wind all the way to National canyon camp and abandoned the idea to continue rowing to Mohawk. We hiked up National canyon instead. Mice running rampant at a lot of camps, but less biting flies this trip.



Day 12 (Sep 9, 2010), Parashant camp (~32 miles): 8,100 cfs steady flow

We saw an albino Bighorn Sheep ram on our way to Lava Falls rapid today. I had heard about this albino Bighorn sheep ram but had never seen him. Quite a sight to behold. Major struggle against the wind today but made it down to Lava by 11 am. Scouted on the right, ran in two groups of boats. I had a great run, rode up high on the cheese grater rock with my stern but far from huge hole on the left. Keith got turned backwards and had to hit the hole rowing for all he was worth - backwards. It was a huge hit, I saw ½ of the underside of his boat high in the air. Eric and Mike had good runs. Oskar flipped immediately in the v-wave



and floated to the left where I chased him. Dave came next (and flipped), with Patti close behind but upright. Then Sue disappeared from view for a long time. She was stuck surfing on the far right of the cheese grater rock but finally popped out. I was too busy chasing Dave and his boat to see much detail of any other runs. I tried to pull Dave's boat to the first eddy on the right below Lava but just could not make it. I had to let his boat go and try again below Son of Lava rapid. Keith finally got Dave's boat to shore, with minor help from me. We re-flipped Dave's boat and enjoyed a post-celebration lunch below Lava before resuming our long windy row to Parashant Wash. Everyone was exhausted when we got to camp but satisfied that we are on track for the next few long days.















Day 13 (Sep 10, 2010), across from Travertine Canyon Falls camp (~31 miles): 8,100 cfs steady flow.

Thank goodness, no wind today. Easy to row 31 miles. Oskar ran every hole in every rapid and swam a LOT. He enjoyed himself. He even managed to clip off a kayak roll in the ducky. We ate lunch at Three Springs Canyon (petroglyphs and spring) and then jumped off the high cliffs. FYI- 8,100 cfs is the lower limit here, they all touched bottom. Little Bastard rapid was easy to sneak. It was strange to row past Diamond Creek takeout at the end of the day. We stopped at Travertine Canyon Falls and hiked up the rope ladders, very steep and scary but beautiful. We floated across the river to camp on a low water sandbar. Better sandy camp in eddy left above the falls (for future reference).

Day 14 (Sep 11, 2010), mud beach across from small Quartermaster camp (~30 miles): 8,100 cfs steady flow

Long row, thankfully no wind. Fun rapids for ~ half a day then flat-water rest of trip. Killer Fang Falls- no scout needed. I boat scout the run easily. Tall sandy riverbanks slough off continuously day/night. 4 mph but slow going, you must row, lots of sandbars to avoid. Helicopters at Quartermaster- must see/hear it to believe it, continuous (from dawn to dusk) and annoying.

Day 15 (Sep 12, 2010), Takeout at Pearce Ferry (~20 miles): 8,100 cfs steady flow

I saw only three marginal camps today, long row out. Flat with current but you must row. The Montana crew has adopted "Cubbie", and he tags along home with them to Montana. We reach the takeout and derig easily. Start our long drive home. The Montana crew takes Oskar with them for a side trip to Montana. They stopped in Las Vegas for one riotous hour to collectively lose \$200 at the gambling tables and then traveled on home. Unbelievably, Oskar sees a Swedish girl he knows from school on the Las Vegas strip- those Swede's do love Vegas. The Montana crew took Oskar to Yellowstone and showed him their Montana stomping grounds. Then Oskar flew back to Colorado for more fun activities before he returned home to Sweden for the winter.



Pros/Con's about going to Pearce Ferry takeout: I created the list below to analyze why I prefer Diamond Creek takeout.

Pros:

- Diamond Creek is Mile 225, ~16 days
- Nice ramp at takeout
- Do not have to worry about Diamond Creek road being open (or not), especially in August.
- Only have to load gear up once, directly into your vehicle.
- Do not have to pay/coordinate fees through Hualapai at Diamond Creek takeout.
- Shuttle is cheaper.
- Adds a ½ day of rapids.

Cons:

- Pearce Ferry is Mile 280, ~20 days on river
- Adds 55 slow flat miles to trip
- Canyon changes character – high sloughing sand banks, lower canyon walls.
- Camps and hike stops are "dirtier or heavily used" below Diamond.
- Only adds a ½ day of rapids.
- Wind better not come up or you are in trouble
- Can shorten time spent above Diamond Creek.
- Poor quality camp choices below Diamond
- MUD!
- Some people rave about night floats like they rave about winter Grand trips- I have no desire to do either.
- If the canyon is so pretty below Diamond, why would boaters want to float past it in the dark of night using night floats?
- Spend your last days on the river rowing too much.
- No room for delays up above Diamond.
- Helicopters at Quartermaster, dawn to dusk everyday
- [Hualapai Native American permit required to go below Diamond.](#)
- Carry a motor?

Diamond Down camps: realistic for higher flows- only camps on river right are allowable now, I struck out the unavailable camps as per Hualapai Native American tribe regulations.

- ~~• Mile 228: Upper Travertine Canyon Falls (unnamed camp on river left, steep beach to tamarisk bushes)~~
- ~~• Mile 230.6: Travertine Falls (river left, small beach but more hidden sand higher up)~~
- **Mile 234.4? Unmarked camp (river right, not great for boats but doable)**
- ~~• Mile 235.5: Bridge Canyon (river left beach)~~
- ~~• Mile 236.7: Below Gneiss (1/2 mile down, unmarked on river left with beach, could make it work if you had to), Gneiss camp itself is too hard to get into the eddy.~~
- ~~• Mile 235.1: Upper Bridge City (unmarked camp river left, small but doable)~~
- ~~• Mile 235.3: Bridge City (big camp, river left, marked by rock path on left)~~
- **Mile 239.8: Separation Canyon (nice space, river right, heavily used)**
- **Above Mile 243: river right, small beach, doable**
- **Mile 243: river right, lots of weeds on overgrown beach**
- ~~• Mile 246.3: Spencer camp (compost toilet, river left, heavily used by Indians)~~

- **Mile 248.7: Surprise canyon (river right, good, looks fun to explore, nice shady side canyon)**
- ~~Mile 260: Quartermaster (river left, is it doable at higher water? helicopter traffic/noise awful)~~
- ~~Mile 277: (around corner, one on each side, left is bigger, right is smaller, why bother, you are almost to the takeout)~~
- ~~Mile 278: (river left, literally above the takeout, again, why bother?)~~