

THE Best Trip



HOW TO RAFT THE COLORADO NOW!

☛ **USED TO BE** if you wanted to paddle the Grand Canyon on your own you waited, um, 25 years. Not any more. A new permit system could have DIY rafters shoving off from Lees Ferry in a year. You can still go guided, of course, but read our step-by-step primer to white-water glory and you may not want to. **BY DAN DUANE**

SKILLS

HOW TO... BECOME THE BOATMAN



Oar techniques, camp cookery, rescue, and boat repair—there's a lot to learn if you're going to lead a group down the Colorado River. The fastest way to gain expertise is with a course in white-water guiding. By the time you graduate (usually after a week or a series of weekends) you'll have the foundation for your own expedition.

WHERE TO LEARN

→ **Canyon R.E.O.**, in Flagstaff, Arizona, offers a six-day immersion program (\$750; www.canyonrio.com) during which students practice skills on the Upper Salt River and Rio Chama, among others.

→ **River Recreation**, in Bothell, Washington, runs a white-water-guiding course over seven weekends on various rivers throughout the Northwest (\$425; www.riverrecreation.com).

HOW TO... HONE YOUR TECHNIQUE

Got the basics down? Don't just throw yourself at the Colorado. Perfect your expedition planning and credentials with a few shorter trips first.



ON THE WEST COAST Start out with a day on the American River in California, then head to Oregon's Rogue River for a four-day wilderness trip. Finish up with a shot down California's supersteep Tuolumne River, a crash course in decision-making.



ON THE EAST COAST Head to Pennsylvania's Youghiogheny River, where the Lower Yough lets you master Class III water and the Upper Yough offers serious Class V challenges. Test your mettle with a two-day run down West Virginia's New River.

For specific information on these rivers and more, American Whitewater maintains a comprehensive database of water-courses around the United States (www.americanwhitewater.org).



Due to its huge water flow and comparatively level gradient, the Colorado is one of the safer white-water rivers in the U.S. Make a mistake and you'll go for a swim—but likely nothing worse.



HOW TO...

READ A RAPID IN 4 STEPS

Not even experienced guides run big water without scouting it first. Master these principles from Bruce Fine, a 20-year river guide from Outdoors Unlimited, and you'll find a safe line every time.

HIT THE BRAKES →

Before you reach an obstacle, pull off where you can climb ashore to walk downstream and scout. "Make sure to stop high enough so you're not committed to one side or the other," Fine says.

WORK BACKWARD →

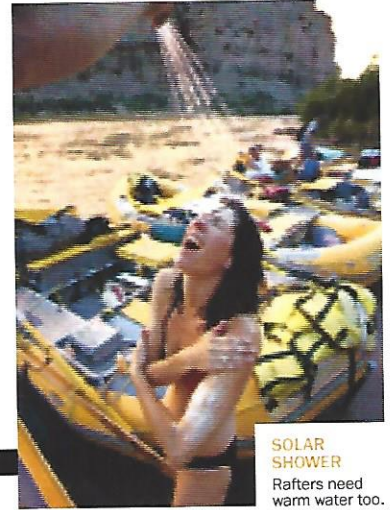
Scope out the bottom of the rapid first, deciding exactly where you want to exit into safe water. From there, work backward, picking a safe line among obvious dangers like boat-swallowing holes.

COMMIT TO MEMORY →

Once you have a plan, burn every landmark into your mind's eye: Go left at the first boulder, say, or take that V-Wave head-on. Without a strategy, it's easy to get lost in the heat of battle.

GO ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS →

If your party is in more than one boat, determine which goes first and where it will wait for possible swimmers. "It's always better to go second," says Fine, "so practice your 'roshambo.'"



SOLAR SHOWER
Rafters need warm water too.

SUPPLIES



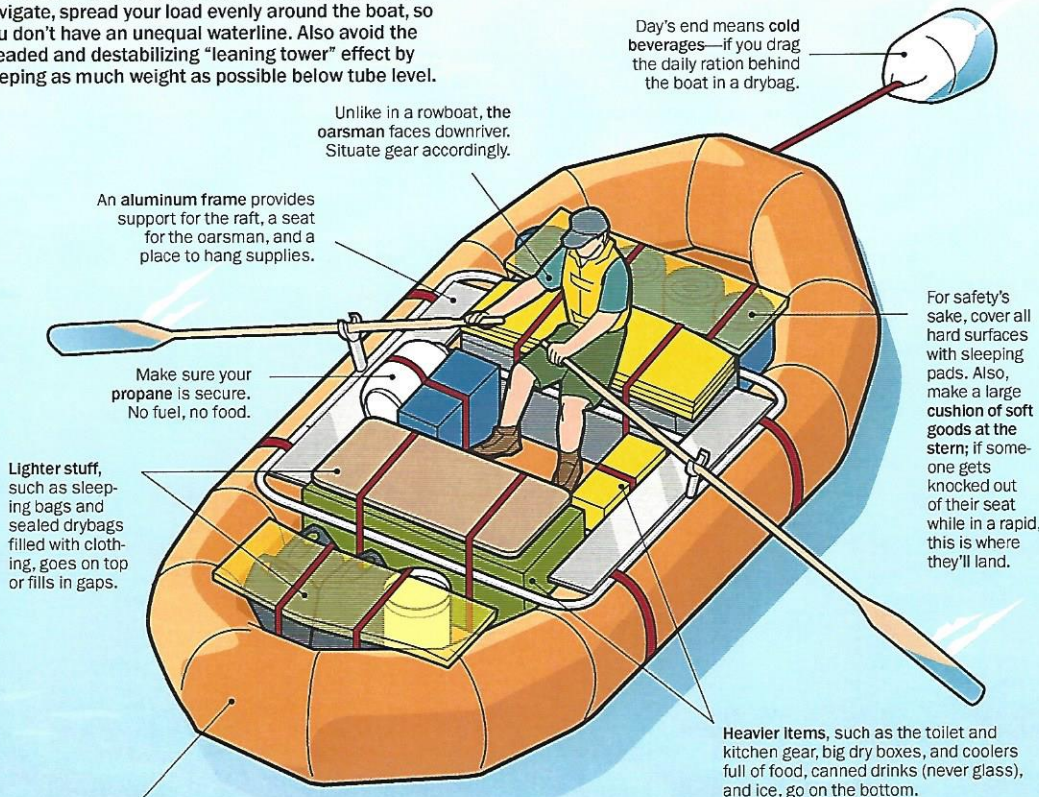
Collecting gear for a few weeks on the river can drain an account faster than it fills your garage. Don't panic: Ceiba Adventures provides fully equipped 18-foot rafts along with prearranged meals, packed and ready to cook (\$760 per person; www.ceibaadventures.com).

HOW TO...

PACK LIKE A PRO

The Colorado River raft of choice is the 18-foot oar boat, an inflated pontoon perimeter with an aluminum rowing frame over a self-bailing floor. Since all boats are basically the same, it's how you pack them that makes the difference between bone-dry victories or water-logged epics.

THE GIST: To keep the raft balanced and easier to navigate, spread your load evenly around the boat, so you don't have an unequal waterline. Also avoid the dreaded and destabilizing "leaning tower" effect by keeping as much weight as possible below tube level.



The standard 18-foot raft holds five passengers and a boatman.

DON'T FORGET...

CANYON ESSENTIALS

Bare necessities will get you down the Colorado, but to ensure a fun and successful trip consider seven crucial items you might not think to bring along:

- **Folding Chair:** Rocks can only go so far.
- **Calling Card:** Phone home at Phantom Ranch.
- **Lightweight Pants:** Shorts don't prevent a burn.
- **Solar Shower:** A month without a warm shower?
- **Hand Mirror:** Shave or signal a rescue.
- **Water Cannon:** Add excitement to flatwater.
- **Superglue:** Seals up a minor cut like a champ (really).

Get a full list of equipment from the Grand Canyon Private Boaters Association, www.gcpba.org.

HOW TO...

PLAY THE LOTTERY

The virtues of the Grand Canyon's new "weighted lottery" are many: 503 DIY permits for 2007 versus 253 in 2006. **Even better, rookies get preference.** Fill out an application online (\$25 application fee; \$400 deposit if you win; <https://npspermits.us>) and cross your fingers.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY COREY RICHAURORA PHOTOS. ILLUSTRATIONS BY JASON LEE. MAPS, FROM LEFT: EMILIE HARJES (2); COMPUTER TERRAIN MAPPING

HOW TO... UNLOCK LAVA FALLS

No Grand Canyon rapid has a more fearsome reputation than Lava Falls. Guide Regan Dale, veteran of more than 250 Colorado River trips, tells us how it's done.

GO RIGHT! LOW WATER

From the push-off 250 yards upstream of the scouting point, hug the rocky shore then slip left into the tongue of the rapid.



As you pick up speed, expect a lateral wave coming off the Ledge Hole to your left. Pivot, hit it bow first, then turn back downstream.

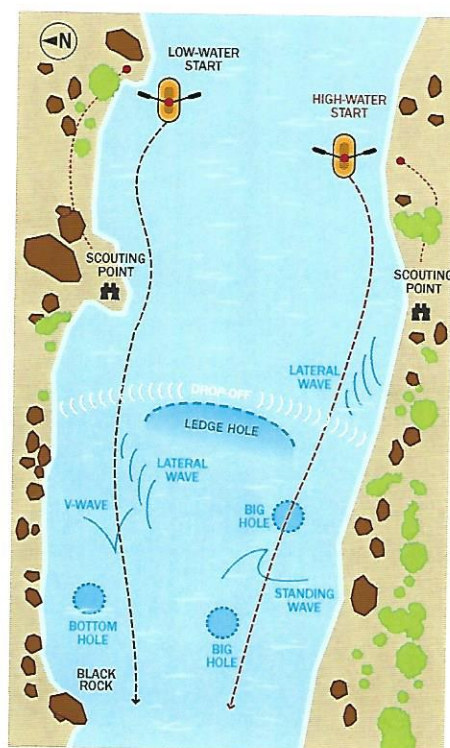


Ready for the storied V-Wave (two laterals coming together as one). Attack it straight on or you will flip.



Depending on the flow, you'll exit either toward Bottom Hole (and a 15-foot standing wave) or Black Rock, an ominous truck-size boulder. Dodge them and you're done!

DUE TO WATER RELEASES at the Glen Canyon Dam, the Colorado's level fluctuates throughout the day. To successfully dodge Lava's number-one hazard, a massive hydraulic called the Ledge Hole, you'll need to choose your course depending on the level of the river.



GO LEFT! HIGH WATER

To start, push off a hundred yards before the scouting point and gradually drift right, aiming for the horizon line of the drop-off.



The first obstacle is a lateral wave from river left: Pivot to face the swell bow first, then quickly pivot back downstream. Don't get broadsided!



Prepare for a steep drop into a big hole then a giant standing wave; hit both head on or you'll flip.



Finally, dodge the last big hole to your right (it'll suck you in). If you don't, brace for a sharp and sudden impact, then you are through.

HOW TO... GO GUIDED

Rafting the Colorado unsupported is not for everyone. Here's a breakdown of outfitted trips to fit any schedule.

4
DAYS

SPEED ASSAULT Take a motorized raft trip on the Upper Canyon, from the Lees Ferry put-in to the hike-out at Phantom Ranch.

Wilderness River Adventures (\$1,060; www.riveradventures.com)

5
DAYS

CUSTOM LUXE Helicopter into Whitmore Wash, where you'll jump into a wooden dory and run the most spectacular part of the Colorado—the Hurricane fault zone and the Lower Grand Canyon. *OARS* (\$1,695; www.oars.com)

8
DAYS

SCENIC ROUTE Join a flotilla of 35-foot motorized pontoon rafts carrying 12 passengers each and running the entire canyon—280 miles from

Lees Ferry to Lake Mead. *Moki Mac River Expeditions* (\$2,650; www.mokimac.com)

9
DAYS

PADDLE-READY Hike from the South Rim down to Phantom Ranch, board a guided raft, and dive—paddle in hand—into some ripping white water. *Outdoors Unlimited* (\$2,475; www.outdoorsunlimited.com)

13
DAYS

FULL MONTY Run the whole 280-mile Grand Canyon as a team member in a paddle raft. Awesome! *Outdoors Unlimited* (\$3,235; www.outdoorsunlimited.com)

SECRETS



DON'T MISS...

5 BEST CAMPSITES



On the Colorado, you've got 280 miles of possible tent sites. We asked guide Bruce Fine to narrow it down to the top five.

CAMPsites

NANKOWEAP

+ Mile 52 +
From your tent you'll be able to hike up to a cache of 900-year-old Anasazi granaries.

TANNER

+ Mile 68 +
Just after the so-called "Great Unconformity" the canyon goes from tight to many, many miles wide. The views are spectacular.

GRAPEVINE

+ Mile 81.5 +
Set up underneath a wall of black schist, some of the oldest rock in the canyon. There are a few bouldering routes nearby.

LEDGES

+ Mile 158 +
Just below Havasu Creek, there aren't a lot of sandy beaches, so count your blessings for this series of tent-friendly limestone ledges.

NATIONAL CANYON

+ Mile 166 +
Behind camp, there's a large wash that leads to a hidden gem of a slot canyon.



HIKES

STONE CREEK

+ Mile 131.5 +
Proceed up a drainage into a canyon with a waterfall about 75 to 100 feet high. Nearby, you'll find well-preserved Anasazi ruins.

TAPEETS TO DEER CREEK

+ Mile 134 +
It's a solid eight miles, but you'll reach Thunder River, one of the world's shortest rivers, the beautiful Surprise Valley, and the Throne Room, where Deer Creek is born right out of the Muave limestone.

WHISPERING SPRINGS

(IN KANAB CANYON)
+ Mile 143.5 +
Hike for a few hours up a dry-dirt drainage and you'll arrive at a secluded grotto that's like something out of Hearst Castle.

MOONEY FALLS

(UP HAVASU CREEK)
+ Mile 156.5 +
At 200 feet, Mooney is one of the tallest falls in the Grand Canyon. The cascade is a terraced masterwork of travertine limestone.



DON'T MISS...

4 GREAT SIDE HIKES

Longtime Grand Canyon boatman and river rat Tom Hatt lays out the four most remarkable excursions in the Big Ditch.

