

Colorado River's appealing side canyons

Mee, Moore and Knowles are convoluted canyons, full of mile after twisted mile of wilderness sights, sounds, and smells.

A great way to experience each of them is to hike up from the mouth of the canyon, where it has widened and spilled its seasonal run-off into the Colorado River. A paddling trip on the Colorado takes significant preparation, but provides access to these amazing side canyons.

Each of these gorges is on the south bank of the Colorado River, in the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Area.

While paddling in a small group there two weekends ago, we counted 18 bighorn sheep at the mouth

of Mee Canyon. Rams, ewes and lambs all milled about at the water's edge. Our kayaks and canoes slipped slowly by without disturbing them.

Mee Canyon enters the river just past the midway point for those paddling the Ruby-Horsechief stretch of the Colorado, from Loma to Westwater. Having hiked the length of Mee Canyon only once, I can say that the lower 5 miles of it are well worth the time spent hiking up from the riverside. Most people who paddle the river limit their hiking to a mile or two from the shoreline. Sometimes the duties of setting up camp, preparing meals, and watching the river flow by take precedence over longer hikes.

Five miles up this particular canyon would get a hiker less than halfway up its length. This would then make it a 10-mile round-trip to return to the campsite by the river. In the heat of real summer, this distance in the desert environment can be less appealing and even inadvisable. That is why the inner areas of these canyons can feel so much like real wilderness to those who do explore them.

Farther along on the river, Moore Canyon joins with the Colorado River, just past the Black Rocks campsites. John Wesley Powell explored this area in the late 1860s, and much of it remains as it must have looked to him back then. This canyon is entered by

If you go

This river requires permits for overnight camping at any time during the year. These permits are available from the BLM office in Grand Junction, either by phone or in person. Fees are charged only during the high use season (May 1 through September 30), and reservations can be made as early as sixty days in advance of your launch date.

Commercial river outfitters are one way to make this trip. People who do not own their own boats and gear and who have no experience in rafting or paddling rivers are thus able to make this trip and hike these canyons.

Reserving campsites during the high use season takes advance planning, as many of the campsites for weekend trips get reserved up to sixty days in advance. Middle of the week trips offer the chance for reserving a site with less advance planning.

This trip begins at the Loma Boat ramp, twenty minutes drive west of Grand Junction. It ends at the Westwater Ranger station, requiring a ninety minute round-trip vehicle shuttle to be done from Loma.

Desert camping skills are necessary, as are self-sufficiency for medical emergencies. Cell phone service is spotty or non-existent there.

These 25 river miles are Class I and Class II; they contain no III, IV, or V. Some skill and judgment are still necessary to be able to retrieve the occasional boater and boat who may capsize along the way.

Permits and other important information are at www.blm.gov, under the Grand Junction field office.

passing between and beneath enormous sandstone pillars that form a natural gateway. Tadpoles swam in the small isolated pools that were present there after the rainy weeks this May. Canyon wrens and desert birds could be heard, and the many colors of cactus blossoms flashed among the cedars and pine trees.

If you are the kind of person who wants to use your legs after being in a boat for a few hours, a zigzag route in a place like Moore Canyon can be just right.

An even more likely place to find complete solitude is Knowles Canyon, which is another mile and a half downriver from Moore Canyon. Only two campsites exist here, reducing the likelihood that a hiker heading up into Knowles will



Zoe Werden stands a stone's throw from the state line, gesturing downstream along the Colorado River. The three tents in the valley below are the group's campsite, the newly established Dolores Landing. (Courtesy photo)

come upon anyone else there, no matter how many miles they go in. This kind of contrast with day-to-day modern life is less and less available to the average citizen, and we are fortunate here on the Western Slope to have this opportunity.

For the first time, this year the BLM has established four new campsites at and beyond Colorado's border with Utah. While none of them is at the mouth of

a canyon, our group found the Dolores Landing campsite to have access to uphill hikes that had spectacular views.

John T. Unger is a Diplomate of the American Chiropractic Board of Sports Physicians, with over twenty-five years of practice in Montrose. He is grateful to live surrounded by this much beauty. Ideas for future columns are welcomed at sportsdocunger.com.

What to know when bringing kids camping

It seems every year, the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse is called out to search for a lost child. These are very difficult searches for us, as most of the members have children of their own and emotions run very high. Most of these searches have to be done immediately as children are often not as prepared to be in the backcountry as adults are. Panic sets into children much faster also. We pull out all stops to find these kids and usually there is a happy ending. With summer bearing down on us, signaling the start of camping, hiking, ATV riding and general outdoor activities, some preparation and planning for the kids is in order. Here are a few tips to help you and your family prepare.

Keep your kids safe in the sun. The hours that the sun is strongest on exposed skin are between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. Limit the exposure of the tender skin of kids during those hours. A hat, long-sleeve shirt and long pants help protect



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

kids more than sunscreen. If you use sunscreen on them, apply it liberally and often, especially to the face. Reapply after swimming or heavy perspiration.

Your child's normal daily fluid intake requirement can be significantly affected by exercise, sweating, heat and altitude. Kids should drink plenty of water before, during and after physical activity. Try and set a pace for them that allows their body to adapt to the heat and altitude. Remember that by the time they are thirsty, the dehydration process has already started.

Before the kids head out, be sure and give

them a nutritious snack such as fruit, trail mix or yogurt. They will burn lots of energy out there and good food and drink will keep them properly fueled. When I was a kid it was soda and candy bars. We have since learned that this is a bad practice as the sugar high wears off quickly and does not provide meaningful fuel for them.

It is never too soon to teach your kids survival skills. By the time they reach their teens they should be able to have basic first aid, fire building skills, provide emergency shelter and use a compass or a GPS. Even young children should be provided with a small backpack with an assortment of snacks and drinks.

There is a program called Hug-A-Tree and Survive. This program helps lost children survive in the woods. The presentation is aimed at kids in kindergarten through fifth grade and teaches them how not to become lost in the woods, and what to do if

they become lost.

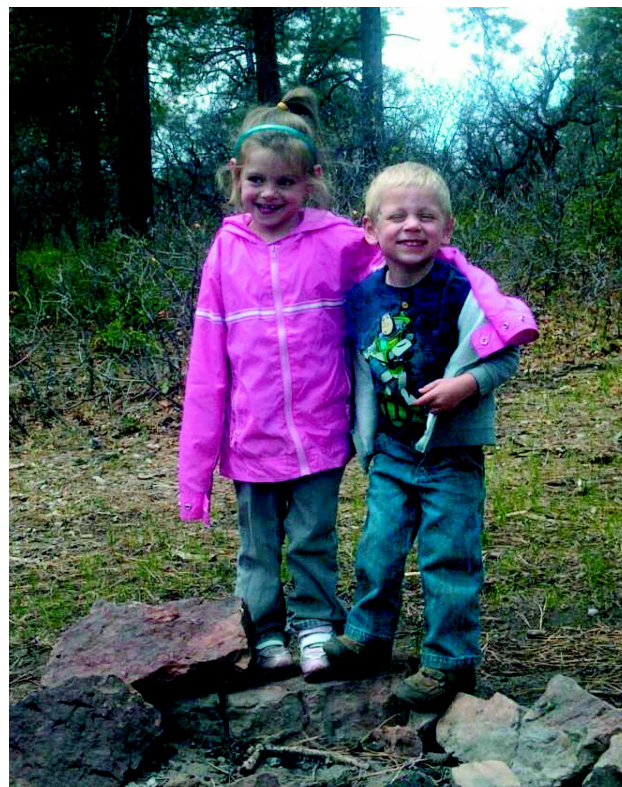
The program was originally developed following the search for Jimmy Beveridge in 1981. There are four simple rules that are core to the Hug-A-Tree presentation:

- Tell an adult where you are going.
- If you are lost, "Hug-A-Tree" and stay put.
- Keep warm and dry.
- Help searchers find you by answering their calls.

The presentation uses a video featuring Johnny who is so excited to explore; he loses his way. Once he realizes he is lost, Johnny uses his head to stay safe and he is well prepared.

We suggest that you provide your young children with a signaling device such as a whistle. Also, a space blanket can help keep them warm and provide some shelter for them. All of this can fit in their backpack with the food and drinks.

Kids love the outdoors. It is up to us to provide them with safe and fun activities out there to help keep them safe.



During camping trips, children need to tell adults where they are going. If they do get lost, they should respond to searchers' calling – and hug a tree and stay put. (Courtesy photo)

Teaching them some basic survival skills may save their life someday. Until next time, see you on the trail.

Mark Rackay is a freelance writer who

serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org.



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