

## Grand Canyon River Trip September 5 – 11, 2004

Journal of Micaela Robles (8<sup>th</sup> grade)

**9/4/04:** Today is the day before my grandma and I leave on the river. It sounds really fun, but at the same time, it sounds really scary. We are at the car repair place right now because we have to get the belts tightened on the car's engine. We are driving about five hours to Marble Canyon today. The best part about road trips is looking out the window, because it changes and the whole way there isn't city. (I also love driving home because it's a relief to finally be home.)

Evening – Marble Canyon, AZ: On the way up here, we stopped at the Arizona River Runners' warehouse in Flagstaff and saw the two rafts we'll be on loaded on the truck ready to go to the river. We stopped at the Cameron Trading Post for lunch. It's really pretty in northern Arizona. It looks like something from a movie. I love driving out in the open because it feels like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders.

At Lee's Ferry, we met the three boatmen (Jon Stoner, Trey Cavolo, and Christina Parker) and two swampers (Sue Spotts and Nancy Yocom) and watched them putting the rafts into the Colorado River. Then we went to see the Navajo bridges. We walked on the original Navajo Bridge, built in 1929. The old bridge was so small, it looked like only horses could go over it, but until 1997, cars actually did. Inside the information center, we met a man who actually worked on building the new Navajo Bridge. The bridges span Marble Canyon, 470 feet above the Colorado River. Tomorrow we'll float under them. The hotel room here isn't the best, but at least I have my own bed. Now that we're packing, I'm starting to get a little excited about the trip. I just don't want to sleep outside!

**9/5/04:** Camped at "Navajo Richard" rapid, Mile # 23 from Lee's Ferry.

At 8 this morning, we had trip orientation at the Marble Canyon Lodge. It was the first time we met the other 26 passengers. Everyone packed their wet bags and we went in vans to the launch site at Lee's Ferry. We started out at about 11 kind of slow. The water was freezing cold. I got soaking wet! The rapids were really fun, and the people are fun, too, even though they are much, much older than me.

**9/6/04:** Camped at Buck Farm Canyon, about Mile # 41.

Today we started out really slow. We hit really, really cold rapids early in the morning. Jesse, one of the other passengers, who is a geologist, knows a lot and he's really funny. It's fun to listen to him explain the rocks, because sometimes he points out things the boatmen don't. We hiked up to Stanton's Cave, then stopped at Redwall Cavern for lunch. Redwall Cavern is like something you would see in "The Twilight Zone," because it's so big and a man didn't carve it out. We also went by "Kissing Rock," which was really weird, too, because it really did look like two people kissing, and wasn't man-made. It was just eroded that way.

At Nautiloid Canyon, we climbed up a cliff, using a rope, to get to the nautiloid fossils. It was *really, really* scary! I thought I was going to fall. Turns out I didn't and it was actually pretty fun. Afterward, I felt good about myself. The animals we saw today are: big-horn sheep, blue herons, frogs, tadpoles (in pools in the rocks at Nautiloid Canyon), and mountain goats.

**9/7/04:** Camped just below Lava Chuar rapid, about Mile # 66.

Today we hiked Nankoweap. It was really steep and I was really scared! The hike was about three miles and a 500-foot elevation change. At the top of Nankoweap, we saw the granary ruins where the Anasazi Indians stored their corn. We also ran into a group of Hopi elders taking a trip down the river with the National Park Service. Just after lunch, we came to the mouth of the Little Colorado River. Sometimes it's green like the Mediterranean Ocean and sometimes it runs muddy. When we got there, it was like the chocolate milk river in "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory." We hiked up the Little Colorado a bit and saw Beamer's cabin, a ruin a prospector named Beamer lived in the 1800's.

That was Mile 62, and from then on the water was muddy, except for the side creeks. Just downriver from the Little Colorado, we passed a place where there was salt residue on the walls of the canyon by the river. The salt mines are sacred to the Hopi people and we were not allowed to go near it. Long ago, for the Hopi boys to become men, they had to hike from the Hopi Reservation 60 miles to the east through the desert alone, get salt by the river, then hike 60 miles back with the salt to be used for sacred ceremonies. (Now they are able to travel by boat.)

You can remember the nine major rock formations in the Grand Canyon by the saying:

Know	-	Kaibab limestone
The	-	Toroweap formation
Canyon		Coconino sandstone
History		Hermit shale
Study		Supai group
Rocks		Redwall limestone
Made		Muav limestone
By		Bright Angel shale
Time		Tapeats sandstone

The weather is really nice and I'm not afraid to sleep outside anywhere any more! My great idea for next year is to sleep on the beach in Australia for a week. (*I wish!*)

(This jumps around.) Christina, one of the boatmen, reminds me of my friend Jessica so much, it's really funny. It's really weird and relieving at the same time how there's no TV, no cell phone, no instant messaging, and no radio out here. There are also no gossiping girls. Everyone gets along really well and helps each other out. I love it!

It's pretty amazing how John Wesley Powell got around without a motorboat. And with one arm! He must have been really fit.

**9/8/04:** Camped just above Blacktail Canyon, at Mile 118. My favorite campsite of the trip.

Today we woke up **extremely** early! (Like 5:30 or something, but Jon, our lead boatman, keeps saying, “There’s no time in the Canyon.”) We had to make miles today, so we didn’t do any hikes. We saw four different animals: a spotted toad, a scorpion, a ring-tailed cat (in our camp), and a Grand Canyon squirrel. There were a *lot* of rapids today: Lava Chuar, Tanner, Unkar, Neville’s, Hance, Sockdolager, Grapevine, Zoroaster, Horn Creek, Granite Falls, Hermit, Boucher, Crystal, Tuna Creek, Nixon, Agate, Sapphire, Emerald, Ruby, Serpentine, Bass, Shinimu, Hakatai, Walterberg, Rancid Tuna, and Elves’ Chasm.

The boatmen made it really fun for me and allowed me to help make dinner. I made the beans we had. All but one person ate my beans and lots of people said how good they were. Then and there I decided that I’m going to work on the river for commercial trips someday. (Jon says he won’t let me do it until I graduate from college, but maybe I can do it in the summers during college.)

**9/9/04:** Camped at Deer Creek Falls, about Mile 135.

Today was a busy – and rainy – day. In the morning, we stopped at Blacktail Canyon, after the Blacktail rapid, and hiked up to see “The Great Unconformity,” which is where one-quarter of the earth’s geologic history is missing. There is rock that is 500 million years old right on top of rock that’s 1.5 billion years old, and geologists have no idea how it got that way.

Then, before lunch, we stopped for a hike up a small creek to a wonderful waterfall that we got to go under. And it had warm water! We had lunch after that hike, but extreme winds were blowing as the boatmen were making lunch and we got rained on. We were on a beach and we found a new meaning to “sand-wiches!” We thought all of our stuff was going to get blown away and people were running around like madmen trying to catch their clothes and hats. And everybody worked as a team to guard the food so we didn’t eat too much sand. It was weird to watch everyone run around, but we all kind of had fun.

Then we went downriver to Deer Creek Falls. On the way, we went through more rapids – with really, really, really cold water: Mile 122 rapid, Forrester, Wallslammer, Spector, Bedrock, Duebendorf, Tapeats, and Deer Creek. We set up camp across from Deer Creek Falls, then we hiked up the cliff to the top of the falls. The hike was another scary one. There were two especially scary parts to the hike. We had to climb up a rock that was a wall, with barely anywhere to put your feet. We helped each other, which made it better, but looking up at it was frightening. The switchbacks weren’t so bad, but at the top, there was one place where we had to walk across a narrow shelf-type ledge over an 80-foot drop to the creek! I was scared that I was going to fall off the shelf, but I didn’t. There was a waterfall chair at the top which was really cool and the water felt nice. After I got back down to the river, I felt good about myself because that hike was pretty difficult, and I MADE IT!

Most nights, we just slept right under the stars, but tonight we knew it was going to rain. We barely had time to get the tent up before the rain started coming down – big-time! The boatmen had just gotten dinner made when it started pouring, so we all helped put up a quick-cover tent and ate standing up. Everybody had to group under the tent so they could eat a dry dinner.

**9/10/04:** Camped at the Lava Tube Camp, at Mile 186.7.

Today we did miles, rapids (Fishtail, Kanab, Matkatamiba, Upset, Sinyala, and Havasu), and hiked up Havasu Creek. It was really a fun hike and a beautiful canyon. The water was nice in temperature and clear, but we were told it was really polluted, so had to be careful to clean ourselves afterward.

This is our last night. We had a campfire, said our “thank-you’s,” laughed a little, and ate some chocolate cake (that was really good) made in a Dutch oven. The campfire was not on the ground. The boatmen brought the wood and a metal pan, which sat up off the ground. The fire was nice and it was good to have a chance to sit with everyone like a family would at the kitchen table.

We unpacked our wetbags and moved our clothing back into our duffle bags so we’ll be ready to take the helicopter in the morning.

**9/11/04:** Last day.

We got up very early again. They made us omelets to order, then at 7:30 we were off. The helicopter was coming for us at 8, and we absolutely **had** to be there and ready. As we were flying out, other passengers were coming in for a two-day rafting trip on our boats. We laughed because they had more stuff than we did, and they were only staying for one night. Then Jon reminded us that they had been at the Bar Ten dude ranch for a couple of days already.

Before the helicopter ride, I was scared of the helicopter, but ready to go home -- and not ready at the same time, because I wanted to stay. The helicopter could hold five passengers on each trip up to the rim. I got to ride “shotgun,” which was really scary. But I appreciated the view, because I got to see that we didn’t finish the whole Canyon, and it gave me an idea of how big the canyon actually was. (John Wesley Powell estimated that the Blue Ridge Mountains would fit into the Grand Canyon.)

We landed at Bar Ten Ranch on the North Rim, and I got to take a REAL SHOWER for the first time in a week! Then we took a small airplane to Marble Canyon. The view from the airplane was just magnificent and wonderful. I felt torn. I wanted to leave to see my Mom and my friends and my family, but I didn’t want to leave the Canyon.

But I know I’ll be back to the Canyon, so I didn’t worry too much.

**After word:**

**9/26/04:** I’m not sure how this trip has impacted my life yet, but I know it did and that someday it will be clear to me.

Right now I do know one thing for sure: I’m grateful for the Grand Canyon