



Family Adventure On the Colorado Green River

By Don Mankin

Ten year-old Beckett, with concentration befitting a brain surgeon, windmilled his way in his inflatable kayak through the churning rapids. I'm not sure this is what his parents had in mind when they let his grandparents take him and his 12-year-old sister on a white water rafting trip down the Green River through Dinosaur National Monument in Northwestern Colorado.

Beckett, his 12 year-old sister and his 70-something grandparents, Roy and Judith, were not the only family unit on this trip. Following him through the rapids, in rafts and inflatable kayaks, were 40-something Jason and Stephanie's son (age 9) and two daughters (12 and 14), as well as the adult sons of 60 year-old Dennis and Joyce.

This was not surprising since Holiday River Expeditions (bikeraft.com), my host for this trip, bills it as a multi-generational family adventure. What I didn't expect was that the kids made the trip even more fun.

First, the details: four days and three nights on the river in oar rafts (i.e., the guide does all the work while the guests lean back soaking up the sun or wringing themselves out after being smacked by a standing wave); at least seven named Class III rapids over the four days; and camping on the beach under the stars.

It wasn't the kids that drew me to the trip. It wasn't even the white water—there are dozens of white water trips offering thrills, spills and chills in the western US in the summer. For me, the main attraction was the scenery and natural history prominently displayed in the soaring walls of rock along the river.

As we floated down the river, we traveled through geologic time to well before the age of the dinosaurs. The canyon walls loom directly overhead at the water's edge and the folds, colors and striations reveal the forces that shaped this magical world over millions of years. With one glance at the canyon walls, I could look back through time and see the history of the Earth embedded in the tilted layers of rock formed by advancing and receding seas and thrust up into view by tectonic might.



I don't know if it was the dramatic scenery, the flowing river or the billion year perspective on my own mortality—most likely a combination of all three—but waves of serenity washed over me as we drifted down the river. That is, until the adrenaline rush of the rapids shattered my calm, in a good way, or a large cold wave shattered my calm, in not such a good way, by slapping me in the face. It was exciting, it was exhilarating and I didn't mind the soaking that much since I was still sitting in the raft, not swimming in the water.

If I wanted more excitement, I could have taken one of the inflatable kayaks through the rapids. Since this was my first outdoor adventure after my total knee replacement several months earlier, I still felt a bit vulnerable and opted to stay in the raft, except for a long stretch of flat water on our last

day. I took maximal advantage of the opportunity, drifting down the river in silence with only the sound of water trickling off my paddle and distant shouts from the kids engaged in a never-ending water fight.

I did test my new knee on a couple of the daily hikes. It passed the tests with flying colors, though the blazing sun and heat did the rest of me in on one of the hikes. I think I'm ready for more serious hiking but I'll wait until cooler weather.

The food was excellent—steak, grilled to order, omelets, also made to order, fajitas, lasagna, pancakes, etc. When I wasn't sitting in a chair on the beach at the end of the day drinking a cold beer or a wee dram or two of single malt whisky, which I had the foresight to bring along for medicinal purposes, I marveled at the ingenuity of the cooks as they prepared elaborate meals with rudimentary means.

My reaction to the kids was the biggest surprise of the trip. My initial take when all five of the kids piled into the van that drove us to our put-in point was that this was not going to be a restful trip. But over the next couple of days, after getting to know them better and observing them in action—and I do mean "action"—I came to appreciate their energy and playfulness. It helped that the guides did a great job of managing the kids and keeping them occupied.

It's trips like this that make me realize that one of the risks of growing old is being cut off from youth, especially for a childless geezer such as me. They remind me of what I might be missing. On the other hand, it was a relief when I bid my goodbyes and made my way home to peace and quiet.

For more information on the Adventure Geezer visit his website and blog at adventuretransformations.com.

