

Utah's Canyonlands River Recreation



Moab Area Travel Council
Internet Brochure Series
Available from:
discovermoab.com

INTRODUCTION

Southeastern Utah is blessed with an abundance of river recreation opportunities. Visitors may select river environments that range from the wilderness settings of Cataract and Desolation-Gray canyons to the more easily accessible sections of the Colorado, Green and San Juan rivers. While the area is known for its whitewater float trips, there are also several scenic flat-water segments suitable for canoes, jet boats, and small powerboats.

The river areas described in this brochure are rated according to a six point international scale. For example, rivers rated as Class I have small, easy to negotiate waves, Class III areas have difficult rapids that require maneuvering and Class VI areas are not considered navigable. Rapids vary greatly by river flow. Some rapids are more difficult to negotiate at high water while others are more difficult at lower water levels. The ratings should only be used to make rough comparisons.

RIVER TRIPS WITH OUTFITTERS

Outfitters take passengers down all of Southeastern Utah's rivers. River Outfitters offer part-day, one-day, and multi-day trips. Most outfitters conduct trips in more than one river area and provide a wide variety of tours. Some outfitters conduct specialty tours such as self-paddle trips, jet boat tours, executive training sessions, women's trips, and kayak instruction. Many outfitters will also provide shuttle and pick-up service. A complete list of all area outfitters is located in our Tour Operator section.

River outfitters in southeast Utah operate under permits issued by either the Bureau of Land Management or the National Park Service. River guides carrying passengers for hire are licensed by Utah State Parks. All guides have first-aid and CPR training.

Reservations and Fees: Reservations for river trips with an outfitter should be made as far ahead as possible, especially for multi-day trips. Trip prices vary by factors such as length, services provided, group size, and river segment.

Equipment Provided: Outfitters generally provide boats, boating equipment, safety equipment such as life jackets and first-aid kits, waterproof bags for storing equipment, watertight boxes for cameras, food, nonalcoholic beverages, ice chests, and return transportation from their office or a prearranged meeting place to the river.

Recommended Gear and Clothing: Passengers embarking upon a one day summertime river trip with an outfitter should bring a sun hat, sun screen, lip gloss, sunglasses with a retention strap, a pair of old sport shoes (they will get wet), a T-shirt, quick drying shorts, a lightweight long sleeve cotton shirt, and a wind breaker. For multiday trips, passengers will need in addition to the above items, extra clothing for use around camp (evenings can be cool along the river), rain gear, personal care items, and walking shoes for hikes. Passengers may bring their own sleeping bag, ground cloth, and tent or rent these items from the outfitter. Consult with the outfitter for more specific information about clothing, camping gear, and personal use items because requirements vary by trip and season.

PRIVATE RIVER TRIPS

Private river trips are organized by individuals on a noncommercial, share cost basis. On private trips, boaters use their own equipment or rent boats and gear and share trip expenses. Government regulations prohibit individuals utilizing private permits from charging for guide services, trip arrangements, or amortization of equipment. For additional

information on private trips, contact the appropriate agency office.

UTAH BOATING LAWS AND RULES

The Utah Division of Parks and Recreation has the primary responsibility for boating safety and enforcement on Utah waters under the Utah Boating Act. On Utah rivers every person on board a vessel must wear a personal flotation device (life jacket) of proper size and of an approved type; except on designated flat water areas where they may be loosened or removed. Persons under 12 years of age must wear personal flotation devices at all times while on Utah rivers. Utah law also requires that an extra oar or paddle be on board, as well as a bailing device. All motor powered craft must be registered in Utah or in the boater's home state.

Colorado River: Daily Section - Hittle Bottom to Takeout Beach

Agency Office: BLM, Moab Field Office
Private Permit Requirement: no
Length: 13 miles from Hittle Bottom to Takeout Beach.
Float Time: 1 or 2 days
Notes: Special regulations apply for overnight use.

The "Daily," located northeast of Moab along Utah highway 128, is also known as the Fisher Towers' section. The Daily is Utah's most popular river trip and is ideal for a short adventure, a group outing, an overnight camping trip, or a first river trip.

The Colorado River Daily is a whitewater trip. Six named rapids are located between Hittle Bottom and Takeout Beach. The rapids may range in difficulty up to Class III. The daily can be challenging at high water levels.

Boaters will be able to view striking red rock scenery that includes Fisher Towers, Castle Rock, and the Priest and Nuns. The area has been the setting of a number of western-style movies and many television commercials.

Colorado River: Westwater Canyon

Agency Office: BLM, Moab Field Office

Private Permit Requirement: yes

Length: 17 miles from the Westwater Ranger Station to the Cisco Landing take out

Float Time: 1 or 2 days

Westwater Canyon is located northeast of Moab and is the first canyon along the Colorado River within Utah. The last section of the Colorado River to be navigated, it is many boaters' first choice for a short challenging adventure.

Westwater is a whitewater trip with 11 rapids that may range in difficulty up to Class IV.

Visitors to Westwater will view the oldest exposed rock in Utah, the Precambrian "black rock", which forms the walls of a 200 foot deep inner canyon. Sheer walls of rust-colored Wingate sandstone tower above the inner canyon. Historic features within the canyon include the miners cabin and the outlaw cave.

Colorado River: Cataract Canyon

Agency Office: National Park Service, Canyonlands

NPS Private Permit Requirement: yes

Length: 112 miles from Moab to Hite

Float Time: 3 to 7 days

Cataract Canyon, located in the heart of Canyonlands National Park, is the best known of southeast Utah's river areas. "Cat" trips may be initiated by floating down either the Colorado River from Moab or the Green River from Green River State Park or Mineral Bottom. The Cataract Canyon stretch of the Colorado River extends from the Colorado's confluence with the Green River to Lake Powell at Hite. Shorter trips utilize a jet boat for the upper portion of the trip. Due to fluctuating water levels on Lake Powell, it may be necessary to have a motor or arrange for a pick up boat to move rafts from the end of the river down Lake Powell to Hite. Contact the River District Office at Canyonlands National Park for more information.

Cataract Canyon is a wild whitewater trip but the sections above the confluence of the Colorado and Green rivers consist of scenic stretches of flatwater. There are 26 rapids within Cataract Canyon with several that may range in difficulty up to Class V.

Visitors may hike to view the rock art and cliff dwellings; left by Indians who once lived in the canyon or just enjoy the massive red rock walls and pinnacles that tower above the river. Cataract Canyon is one of the most isolated and starkly beautiful areas of the 48 contiguous states.

Green River: Desolation-Gray Canyons

Agency Office: BLM, Price River Resource Area

Private Permit Requirement: yes

Length: 75 miles from the Sand Wash Ranger Station launch to the first take out point at Nefertiti Rapid or 84 miles to the second take out point at Swaseys Rapid at the end of Gray Canyon.

Float Time: 4 to 7 days

Desolation-Gray canyons are located along the Green River north of Green River, Utah. Desolation Canyon is the deepest canyon in Utah. At Rock Creek, the river is over 5,000 feet below the canyon rim.

The trip through Desolation-Gray canyons is a whitewater trip. Of the 67 rapids, most are Class 11, but several may be as difficult as Class IV.

Visitors to Desolation-Gray canyons will have the opportunity to view rock art created by Indians of the Fremont culture and the ancestors of the Ute Indians. The area was also used by outlaws such as "Butch Cassidy" and "Flat-Nose George" as a refuge. Desolation-Gray canyons include large cottonwood tree sheltered campsites, a coldwater fishery at Rock Creek, and a wide variety of geologic features.

Desolation Canyon has been designated as a National Historic Landmark to preserve the setting of the John Wesley Powell expeditions.

Green River: Lower Gray Canyon - Nefertiti Rapid to Swaseys Rapid

Agency Office: BLM, Price River Resource Area

Private Permit Requirement: no

Length: 8 miles from the launch point at Nefertiti Rapid to the take out at Swaseys Rapid

Float Time: 1 or 2 days

Lower Gray Canyon (the Green River Daily) is located to the north of Green River, Utah, below Desolation-Gray canyons. The Daily is ideal for a short adventure or a first river trip. The area is popular with organized groups. The launch point is a short drive from Interstate 70, making it ideal for those with limited time.

The Green River Daily is a whitewater trip. There are seven rapids, some of which may range in difficulty up to Class III.

Green River: Labyrinth Canyon/Stillwater Canyon - Green River City to Mineral Bottom or Spanish Bottom

Agency Office: BLM, San Rafael Resource Area for Labyrinth Canyon and Canyonlands National Park for Stillwater Canyon

Private Permit Requirement: yes for Labyrinth Canyon; yes from NPS for Stillwater Canyon

Length: 68 miles from the launch point at Green River State Park in Green River City to the take out at Mineral Bottom or 120 miles to the confluence of the Green and Colorado Rivers.

Float Time: 3 to 8 days

Labyrinth and Stillwater canyons are located south of the city of Green River. Visitors may view several Indian rock art sites and historic inscriptions left by early day river travelers. The hike to the top of the neck at Bowknot Bend offers expansive views of the river and its canyon setting.

There are no rapids along this portion of the Green River making it highly suited for multi-day canoe trips. Visitors

planning to use rafts should allow plenty of time because the river flows through these canyons at a leisurely pace. Sandbars can create problems for parties with rafts at flows below 1200 cubic feet per second (CFS).

Ruby Ranch, located 20 miles below Green River State Park, is an alternate access point. A fee is charged for parking at and launching from the privately owned area. Mineral Bottom is the last take out point accessible by road before the rapids of Cataract Canyon. If you plan to take out at the Confluence or Spanish Bottom, arrangements must be made prior to your trip to have you and your raft or canoe taken back upriver by jet boat. There is no vehicle access take out once you enter Canyonlands National Park. Jet boat service is provided by two commercial companies: Canyonlands by Night & Day (800-394-9978), Tag-A-Long Expeditions (800-453-3292) and Tex's Riverways (435-259-5101).

Boaters launching from Green River are requested to register at the BLM visitor box at Green River State Park. Parties launching from Ruby Ranch should register at Mineral Bottom. A brochure on calm water float trips on the Green River is available from discovermoab.com.

San Juan River: Upper San Juan - Sand Island to Mexican Hat

Agency Office: BLM, San Juan Resource Area

Private Permit Requirement: yes
Length: 26 miles from the Sand Island Campground to the BLM boat ramp at Mexican Hat

Float Time: 1-3 days

The upper San Juan is located to the west of Bluff, Utah. The southern bank of the river is the northern boundary of the Navajo Indian Reservation. The upper San Juan is well known for superb Indian rock art left by the Anasazi culture. Visitors may also hike to view the ruins of Anasazi dwellings and the remains of an historic trading post. This section of the river is also known for its geologic and scenic features.

The upper San Juan is a whitewater trip. Several small rapids may range up to Class III.

San Juan River: Lower San Juan - Mexican Hat to Lake Powell

Agency Office: BLM, San Juan Resource Area and NPS, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area

Private Permit Requirement: yes, from BLM

Length: 54 miles from the BLM boat ramp at Mexican Hat to the first take out at Clay Hills Crossing

Float Time: 3-6 days

The lower San Juan is located to the west of Mexican Hat. Below Mexican Hat, where it cuts through the Raplee Anticline, the San Juan River has carved the deepest set of entrenched "goosenecks" (meander loops) in North America.

The lower San Juan is a whitewater trip. Several rapids may range in difficulty up to Class III. Due to low water levels boaters can no longer take out at Piute Farms.

Visitors are attracted to the lower San Juan by the beauty of the serpentine goosenecks, excellent hiking opportunities, and the pools at Slickhorn Canyon. BLM requires a permit for hikes extending more than 3 miles from the river into the Grand Gulch Primitive Area.

Dolores River: Gateway Colorado to the Colorado River Confluence

Agency Office: BLM, Moab Field Office

Private Permit Requirement: yes

Length: 30 miles from Gateway to the mouth of the Dolores River

Float Time: 2-3 days

The lower Dolores is located to the east of Moab. This segment starts near Gateway, Colorado, and ends in Utah where the Dolores River merges with the Colorado River. The lower Dolores is normally navigable with small rafts during the spring. During dry years this section may not be navigable. River flows are dependent upon releases from McPhee

Reservoir. Call the river flow information number for conditions (801-539-1311).

The lower Dolores is a whitewater river. The rapids may range in difficulty up to Class IV. This area has several miles of steep-walled canyons. Cottonwood tree shaded river bottoms provide good camping opportunities.

San Rafael River: The Little Grand Canyon - Fuller Bottom to San Rafael Campground

Agency Office: BLM, San Rafael Resource Area

Private Permit Requirement: no

Length: 15 miles from Fuller Bottom to the San Rafael Campground

Float Time: 1-2 days

The Little Grand Canyon is located south of Price. There are numerous campsites, Indian rock art, and nice side canyon hikes within the Little Grand Canyon. The San Rafael is navigable by small rafts, paddle boats, and canoes for a short period during the spring if there is sufficient water. During dry years this section may not be floatable. A minimum of 250 CFS is required. Call the river flow information number for conditions (801-539-1311).

There are no rapids along this portion of the San Rafael River. There are several sections of rapid water and there may be hazards such as logs and fallen trees.

RIVER USE ETHICS

River areas are fragile environments that degrade without proper care by visitors. The Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service have developed permit requirements designed to protect the qualities of most of the river areas in Southeastern Utah. On trips with commercial outfitters, river guides will provide instruction about disposal of human waste, the disposal of different types of trash, and other practices. For private river trips, it is the responsibility of each boater to follow applicable river protection requirements. In the case of less intensively managed river areas, boaters are strongly encouraged to practice the highest standard of river ethics possible.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Moab Area Travel Council

Main & Center
P. O. Box 550
Moab, UT 84532
800-635-6622
www.discovermoab.com

The Moab Area Travel Council in Moab publishes a brochure that includes a list of river outfitters based in Grand County. The Moab Information Center in Moab also distributes brochures published by outfitters and sells river guidebooks covering the Moab areas.

San Juan County Travel Council

117 South Main
Monticello, UT 84535
800-574-4386
www.southeastutah.com

The San Juan County Travel Council publishes a Visitors Guide that includes a list of river outfitters. The council's office also distributes brochures published by outfitters.

Canyonlands Natural History Association (CNHA)

3031 S. Hwy. 191
Moab, UT 84532
800-840-8978
www.cnha.org

CNHA sells river guidebooks, maps and regional publications through the mail and at multi-agency centers in Moab and Monticello, National Park visitor centers and BLM and USFS offices in SE Utah. Limited publications are also sold at Westwater Canyon and Desolation-Gray Canyons launch sites. For a mail-order catalog, or to place an order, call 1-800-840-8978.

Utah Guides and Outfitters

P. O. Box 21141
Salt Lake City, UT 84121
www.utah-adventures.com

Utah Guides and Outfitters (UGO) is the industry trade association for Utah river outfitters. UGO can provide lists of outfitters operating on Utah's rivers.

John Wesley Powell River History Museum & Visitor Center

885 East Main
Green River, UT 84525
435-564-3427

On the banks of the Green River, this museum features exhibits dedicated to the history and use of the Green, Colorado and San Juan rivers. Of special interest are full size replicas of boats like those used by Powell and other explorers. Fee charged for museum.

Bureau Of Land Management

www.ut.blm.gov

BLM, Moab Field Office
82 E. Dogwood
Moab, UT 84532
435-259-2100

BLM, Price River and San Rafael Resource Area
125 South 600 West
Price, UT 84501
435-636-3622

BLM, San Juan Resource Area
P.O. Box 7 (435 N. Main)
Monticello, UT 84535
435-587-2144

National Park Service

www.nps.gov

Canyonlands National Park River Permits
2282 S. West Resource Blvd
Moab, UT 84532
435-259-4351

Utah Division Of Parks & Recreation

www.stateparks.utah.gov

Utah Division of Parks and Recreation

Southeast Region Office
1165 S. Hwy 191 Ste #7
Moab, UT 84532
435-259-3750

Utah Division of Parks and Recreation

Dead Horse Point State Park
P.O. Box 609
Moab, UT 84532
435-259-2614

The BLM and NPS provide lists of outfitters authorized to conduct commercial river trips. These federal offices are the authoritative sources of information about private permit systems, user fees, and the availability of permits. Additional information about the requirements of the Utah Boating Act may be obtained from Utah Division of Parks and Recreation offices.

River Flow Information

For recorded Utah river flow information call the National Weather Service River Forecast Center at (801) 539-1311. To obtain further information about reservoir water releases, call the Upper Colorado Regional Office of the Bureau of Reclamation in Salt Lake City at (801) 524-5576.

The information in the brochure is compiled by Utah's Canyonlands Travel Region in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management, Moab District; the National Park Service, Canyonlands National Park; and the Utah Division of Parks and Recreation.

Moab Information Center
Main & Center St, Moab

Moab Visitor Information
(800) 635-6622
(435) 259-6281

discovermoab.com

