SAN JUAN RIVER TOUR

May 27, 2014 was a great day to start a river trip. It was sunny and warm as three crew (Jen, Ed and Charlie) and eighteen others gathered on the shore of the San Juan River outside Bluff, Utah. It took about an hour for everyone to get their gear stored in dry sacks and loaded onto the rafts. We were all fitted for life jackets or PFDs (personal flotation devices) and we climbed onto three rafts and four “duckies”. Off we went into the muddy waters of the river.

We floated for a short time and stopped across from a rock art panel that was at the confluence of Butler wash and the San Juan. The pictographs and petroglyphs were from the Archaic and Basketmaker periods. After lunch we stopped to explore a cliff dwelling which was a short hike from the river. It was perched on a rock ledge under a wide overhang. It is called River House and was occupied by ancestral pueblos between 700 AD and 1300 AD. It has 14 rectangular rooms and two round kivas. We were able to enter most of those rooms. We saw rock art on the overhang and in several areas throughout. There were grinding slicks, pottery sherds, lithics, and burned corn scattered in and around the site. After some time we headed back to our rafts and drifted down to our first camping spot on the river. Before dinner some horses from the Najavo reservation crossed the river right into our camp.

In the morning, after loading the rafts, we went down a few hundred yards to the opposite side of the river to Chinle wash. We hiked up the canyon to look at rock art. Along the way we saw a number of cliff dwellings that were high up on the cliffs on the other side of the canyon. The rock art, again, were pictographs and petroglyphs of people, animals and various geometric shapes. We headed back to our rafts to get ready for the wildest part of our trip.

As the river narrowed, our guides prepared us for the class I – II rapids we were soon to encounter. We did the four-foot rapid and then eight-foot rapid. Most of us got wet, particularly those of us in the “duckies”. We pulled over almost immediately to our Sunday night camping spot. We set up our tents while the guides prepared our dinner. It was sunny, but clouds were starting to form. After dinner, our guide, Charlie, took those interested on a hike to look at fossils.

Monday morning, our final day on the river, brought sunny skies. After loading up the rafts, we headed out for a leisurely float the last eleven miles of our trip. We encountered a few small rapids, but it was an easy float. We stopped briefly at a spot where there was an old stone cabin. It was built for a John Wayne movie titled, “She Wore a Yellow Ribbon”. We had a snack and headed for our put out spot in Mexican Hat. We passed the Mexican Hat sandstone formation for which the town was named and a spot where we could see the tops of sandstone formations in Monument Valley. Soon we came to our put out spot. Our trip was over.

Our Moab Rafting and Canoe Co. crew were superb! They made the trip safe and fun. Our group of eighteen rafters had a great time despite the rain. We saw wonderful archeology with all the rock art, cliff dwellings and artifacts we saw. I overheard someone say that the trip exceeded their expectations. We want to give a big thanks to Beth Parisi for organizing the trip.
Butler Wash Petroglyphs