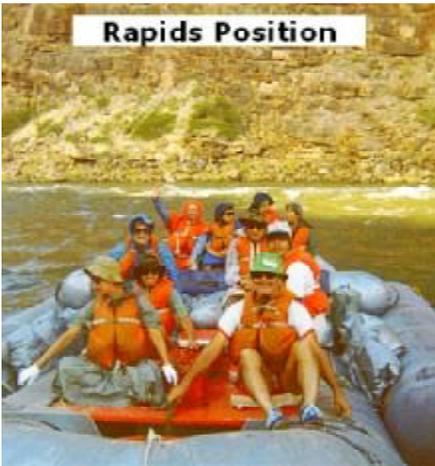


Rafting The Grand Canyon



Those were words to be taken very seriously as Mary and I spent nine days going through the Grand Canyon on a raft. We started at Lees Ferry, Arizona and ended at Lake Mead, Nevada nine days and 280 miles later. Some of the more than 150 rapids were awesome.

We were all seated and hanging tightly to ropes beside us. I was riding point; that was my preferred position for the entire trip. The lady in the rear waving her hand at the camera is Mary. After three years of gentle persuasion she had agreed to the trip. We were in our mid-fifties.

Ten passengers and two boatmen were on the thirty seven foot raft. A small outboard motor at the rear was used for steering. Each individual was allowed to bring the amount of clothing and toiletries that would squeeze into a grocery shopping bag.

Several times during each day we would stop at one of the numerous small sand beaches along the river. We would sometimes just walk to loosen up a bit. If it was near noon, we would look for a shady spot to have a nice lunch. Other times we would explore one of the many scenic side canyons.

I vividly recall one such expedition. Our destination was about a half mile up the canyon. It required swimming about a quarter mile upstream and walking the rest of the way.

I quickly discovered that swimming while wearing shoes is a very strenuous activity. It was not very deep; in most places I could stand, chin deep on the bottom. At one point a young lady, who was not as tall as I, asked for help as she was having difficulty keeping her head above the water. We made it OK.



Here we were unloading our over night gear at the end of a day. We would stake out a sleeping spot on the sand and prepare for a gourmet dinner. That is not a tongue-in-cheek remark. The boatmen became chefs, and the meals were excellent. I am the guy with the green hat, and I was already dressed for dinner.

We slept on the sand under the stars. There was no air pollution, and the sky was so clear that we could count the satellites going over.

Examining the small tracks in the sand around our tarp was a morning ritual. A lot of small critters had been checking us out.

Traversing Lava Falls at mile 179 was one of the most memorable and scary experiences of the trip. Over a distance of about a quarter mile the river level drops about twenty five feet.

The boatmen found a spot where they could stop the raft and observe the falls. They spent at least twenty minutes watching the river and discussing strategy.

Trouble began early in the descent. A wave swept over the raft, and the outboard motor sputtered and died. Without steering control we came very close to the jagged canyon wall. The boatmen used their paddles to keep us away from the wall. We heaved a collective sigh of relief as we got to a more tranquil part of the river.

We were met by a bus at Lake Mead and taken to Las Vegas.

During a farewell dinner with our rafting companions one of the younger men asked Mary what she thought about the trip. In response she said, "Well, it's like being pregnant. After it's over, you are glad you did it."