

Western Trip - 2007

By John Kobak

Elliott Drysdale was again in charge of organizing our almost annual Western paddling trip. We had twelve paddlers total with Michael Duvall, Cliff Wire, and Jim McHale from MI only staying for the first week. Becky Sink from MI, Lee Owen from CT via FL, Duncan & Marina Campbell, from Australia via Bowling Green, OH and Doug Smith were heading out west for their first experience with paddling the fast, cold western whitewater. The usual suspects were there; Bob Nicholson from Bowling Green, Elliott Drysdale, John Kobak and Bill Miller from the Cleveland area.



My new kayak at Sunshine, Royal Gorge

The new paddlers paddled 12 straight days, some days paddling more than one river section each day. Some of us old guys paddled only 8 days and did some resting along the way. Our one week paddlers did 6 straight days before heading back home. We never really all paddled together in one group, but we paddled on the same sections.

Water levels were a little high this year. Not too high, but enough for us to have added the Eagle River, and Roaring Fork. We had challenging levels on all the sections of the Arkansas which ran as high as 2300 cfs.

We got our usual camping spots on the Poudre at Mtn. Park Campground which makes it easy to set up shuttles. The Poudre ran about 4' for the four days we were there. Duncan was the only one who challenged the Middle Narrows with a local paddler. We set safety, he did great.



Duncan Campbell

Our one week paddlers, Michael, Jim and Cliff left the Poudre a day early to do the Roaring Fork in Aspen with Becky. Things didn't start out too well at the first rapid "Entrance Exam". They had two swimmers with Cliff bruising a rib which turned him into a photographer and a shuttle bunny for the remainder of his trip. The level was about 1000 cfs.

The next day our group headed over to run the Eagle River and a rapid called Dowd's Chutes, right under the I-70 bridge in Minturn. Of course communication was not too good which resulted in us dividing up into two groups of four. Duncan's group ran only a one mile section of the Eagle then went back to Vail to run a section of the Gore. This way they got to run Dowd's twice. Both groups had one swimmer at Dowd's which was running about 1500 cfs. We continued on our way to Buena Vista and caught up with Michael's group who had just gotten off of the Numbers run. We all camped together on Thursday night at BLM and decided we would all paddle the Royal Gorge on Friday since that was the last day our one week paddlers could paddle.



Elliott at Sunshine, Royal Gorge

The Royal Gorge of the Arkansas River was running at 2300 cfs. Cliff Shuttled for us and tried to take pictures from the 1000' high suspension bridge. It's a long way down, anyone see Elliott?



Below the Royal Gorge Suspension Bridge

We broke up into two groups, a play group and a cruising group. The cruising group beat Cliff to the take-out.

The Arkansas level had dropped to 1600 cfs on the weekend, which made for a nice run on the Numbers. Duncan gave Pine Creek Canyon rapid a try and found out that the big hole is not only hard to miss but gets very sticky at this level. However, even though his skirt popped he managed to make it safely to shore to empty out.

Monday's flows went back up to 2200 cfs so we decided to do the popular Brown's Canyon run. This way the new people could experience all that the area had to offer. The newbies had even added on the Frog's Back section to their Numbers run on Sunday so that they wouldn't miss anything.



Marina Campbell at Zoom Flume

Tuesday was a bad day for paddles; we decided to run the Numbers one more time even although the level had climbed to 2200 CFS. Things went OK until we got to Rapid Four, the hardest rapid at this level. I was leading and flipped, heading toward the diversion ditch. A missed roll and some nicely placed shore rocks allowed me to quickly get out of the water without a swim but my paddle and kayak went in. I figured, that was good, they would hit a dead end and I could retrieve them. While I was looking for the paddle I saw Bill flip and have a really bad swim in the center of the river. My paddle was stuck on some rocks but eventually disappeared. The kayak just went right back into the river and kept going along with Bill, his boat and paddle. Bill finally got pulled to shore but was told to let go of boat and paddle and that was the last time he saw his paddle. Bob & Elliott were able to snag our kayaks before they got to the bridge above Rapid Five. Bill & I, sans paddles, decided that this was enough paddling for us today. So we drove to Aspen to have a nice meal at Annie's.

After dinner, Elliott, Bill and I decided to scout the Roaring Fork. Elliott and I decided that if the other group had some swims here at lower water level that maybe we should just head home a day early. However, our newbies, Duncan, Marina, Doug and Becky had come to paddle and with Bob and Bill along they would paddle the Roaring Fork on Wed. morning before heading back to run the Clear Fork in Golden and then back to Ohio



Jim McHale

As usual it was a great trip and we all enjoyed the rivers, the weather, the camping & camaraderie.