

Western Trip - 2005

By John Kobak

Elliott Drysdale again led this year's Colorado whitewater trip. The trip has always included the Poudre River near Fort Collins and the Arkansas River near Buena Vista. This year, since a lot of snow fell in Southwestern Colorado we also decided to head to the Pagosa Springs area to attempt to run the San Juan and the Piedra Rivers.

Our group consisted of Santo & Kris Albright, Judi Cleary, Wayne, Missy & Angie Carey, Elliott Drysdale, Michael Duvall, Carl & Donna Homberg, John Kobak, Bill Miller and Kathy Needham.

Carl & Donna had been in CO for a week paddling with their son Craig and Harry Guyton. We caught them on their way home and they just paddled with us one day on the Poudre. Judi flew in after we left the Poudre so she only paddled for the second half of the trip. The rest of the people did most of the trip.



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I drove out with Elliott and due to my inattention as navigator we missed a turn in Chicago and were heading for Wisconsin. I finally realized this when we were paying too many tolls. We quickly got back on track and met up with Michael Duvall in Sterling, CO. The next morning we got our usual campsites on the Poudre as the weekend campers streamed home, because of the nasty weather. We had two very cool windy days and a little rain, it was really unusual for this time of year. It then got really hot which causes the rivers to rise from the snow melt. So in CO when it rains the rivers drop, when it's hot they rise. The water temperatures are cold compared to Eastern rivers. The Poudre runs about 45°F and the Arkansas about 50°.

We caught good levels on the Poudre, about 3 to 3 ½' on the rock gauge. It was a little different each day, but all were very nice levels. The Poudre generally runs too low for fun paddling by the end of June. Everyone had pretty good runs

from the White Mile to Mountain Park Campground and Mishawaka and Pine Vu sections. We ran each of them twice. Five people did the annual downhill bike ride from Poudre Falls back to camp.

Since we needed to pick up Judi who was flying in to Denver on Wednesday we left the Ft. Collins area and headed Southwest to the BLM campground near the Arkansas.

Missy at Pine Vu



View of Collegiate Peaks from our BLM campsite

The campsite has a lot going for it except facilities, which it has none. Great views, convenient location, big enough for large group and best of all it's free. Pay showers are available in downtown Buena Vista.

The Arkansas river level had dropped because of last weekend's cold spell but was now starting to rise. Most of our group ran the Numbers section for two days at 775 and 900 cfs. Judi got used to the fast water with a smaller group on the Frog's Rock or Fractions section. Everyone had good runs. I demoed a Diesel 75 which I found it a little too big for me. I had a very short swim after running rapid 5, guess I'll stick with my GT for now.

We figured there would be crowds on the river this coming weekend because of the [FIBArk race](#) in Salida so we headed South to the Piedra River. When we got there we found that the river was roaring. It was running over AW's suggested maximum flow of 1500 cfs. Since it is a 19 mi. class V wilderness run and none of us had ever run it before, the group opted to paddle the class II-III Mesa Canyon of the San Juan River instead. It was running a high 2300 CFS, so it was a fast run with an easy shuttle.

Since I had been paddling for 6 straight days I decided to rest in my hammock while everyone paddled Mesa Canyon. On Sunday the Piedra had still had not come down so most of the group decided to take a 4 hour long horseback ride up the Piedra River, Judi & Bill hiked up to a hot spring along the river and I headed to town to try to get internet access to maintain our website.

We said goodbye to Santo & Kris but the rest of the group headed back to the BLM campground where we found that the Arkansas had risen to 2200 cfs because of the continued hot weather. This is a Medium-High level. The Carey's, Elliott, Michael and I ran Brown's Canyon. Zoom flume and Seidel's Suckhole were especially memorable to me. Wayne was running sweep and accidentally bumped me out of the hole at the bottom of Zoom Flume that I had just got stuck in. Thank you Wayne. Then while approaching Seidel's with Elliott, I warned him that I think we are heading into the rapid. I spun around on the hole that I use to get right of the Suckhole and Elliott submarined under me, however we both made it through successfully.



Kobak at Seidel's Suckhole

Judi & Michael headed for home and the next day The Carey's, Elliott and I headed to the Royal Gorge which was running a Medium-High 2300 cfs.

The Gorge trip is an awesome experience. The views of the gorge are incredible. You start in a small river valley and the 1000' high cliffs soar up around you as you paddle into the gorge. The water is very pushy at this level but none of the rapids seemed any harder than normal. In fact the approach to Sunshine is easier at this level since you can run on the right side all the way from the top of the rapid. Now that we knew where Sledgehammer Rapid was, that was a

non-event also. It was a fast run which got us on the road early to Colorado Springs to visit Elliott's daughter and fiancé who have both taken up kayaking.



Royal Gorge Bridge from the river

Wayne and his girls headed back to Buena Vista. They have been visiting the highest point in each state. In fact they visited a few on their way out to CO.

Wayne sent this picture of Mt. Elbert, at 14,433 the highest point in CO. Elbert also enjoys the importance of being at the headwaters of the Arkansas River which begins at its base near Leadville.

Their 12 mile round trip hike from Twin Lakes Campground took them almost 12 hours, it is a 5000' climb.

So if you haven't made a Colorado trip yet, there is something for everyone. You don't need to paddle every day and there are plenty of easier runs for less experienced paddlers. It's fun to go with a group that can point your way to the high points. However, unless you fly out it's tough to do in one week's time. My favorite time is mid June to early July.



Missy Carey on Mt. Elbert, Highest point in Colorado