



# The Voyageur's Companion

Newsletter of the Rocky Mountain Canoe Club  
[www.rockymountaincanoecub.org](http://www.rockymountaincanoecub.org)

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May 2010 issue

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Jeanne Willson, editor

## Editor's Eddy Lines

Jeanne Willson

**The season so far:** Karen Amundson and Mark Roberts co-led a trip on the Gunnison from Escalante to Whitewater, with a layover day for hiking.

Mark has really raised the bar for Best Eats on a Canoe Trip with his 8 pounds of perfectly cooked salmon, other amazing goodies, and sourdough French toast with real maple syrup the next morning! Thanks also to Mark's wife, who shopped for the food and stayed home with the little ones. Other potluck contributions made dinner a feast to remember, while we were forgetting the snow and rain that we had to drive through to get to the put in. Marci and Jerry Nolan drove shuttle for us; a big thank-you to you both, and it was fun to see you! Once we were on the river, the rains cleared up and the short paddling days were perfect as headwinds slowed us down a bit. The Dominguez Canyon hike was stunning, as always.

**Safety:** I'm delighted to report that many of our club members have now gone through a day-long training on swiftwater safety and rescue taught by Sammer Elias. The more of us who get this type of training, the better prepared we all are to prevent or deal with emergency situations. Although I took the training, I am grateful to all of the other folks who took it as who knows -- I might be the one who needs to be rescued.

This is a good time to remind paddlers to take a first-aid course, too. The Colorado Mountain Club has developed a terrific Wilderness First Aid program. It's taught by experienced outdoorspeople, physicians, and rescue personnel (EMTs). Anyone, whether or not they lead trips, will be contributing to the canoe club simply by taking

## TAKE NOTE!

May trips:

Mat Bozek led a trip from Fruita to Westwater, down the Ruby-Horsethief canyons on the Colorado. Although it's a fairly easy run, this is a favorite for many paddlers, even experienced ones, due to the scenic beauty of this run. His trip report is in this issue.

Karen Amundson will lead a trip down the San Rafael River in Utah, through the "Little Grand Canyon." The drive is long and the canoeing part is short (around 17 miles) but we hope for spring desert wildflowers and some fabulous hiking. It appears that due to low flow, the trip will execute Plan B, to paddle the Dolores from below Bedrock to Gateway.

Bill Ashworth is traveling to the Niobrara in northern Nebraska for the trip he'll lead over Memorial Day weekend. It's one of America's premier Scenic Waterways but it's an easy and delightful run for beginners.

Jeanne Willson is trying to find a weekend to lead a South Platte run from Brighton to Ft. Lupton that won't interfere with her son's wedding. Email or call her if you think you'd be interested.

these courses and being better prepared to help themselves and help others. We encourage all club paddlers to consider both swiftwater rescue training and wilderness first aid training.

**Skills:** Jerry Nolan has written up a helpful article about river flow levels. Consider picking a river – preferably one that you can actually visit a few times such as the Platte - and watching its flow over the next several weeks as spring rains and mountain runoff change the river.

*Gflows!tipsz!*

!

## Wildlife on the Waterways – Part 1

Jeanne Willson

Find your line through the rocks ... oh, there is a drop ahead! Watch out... mid-river boulder coming ...

Do we canoe for the excitement, the technical challenge? Do we go home and tell our friends that we just canoed 22.5 miles of flat water, and 2.5 miles of extremely exciting rapids? (Maybe not!). For me, while I enjoy the rapids, a big part of a good river trip experience is the wildlife, dead (fossilized) or alive or drawn on the rocks hundreds of years ago. It's our chance to see the West the way it was hundreds of years ago ... and the way it wasn't. I've compiled some information about critters we get to see, as much for my own interest as for yours.

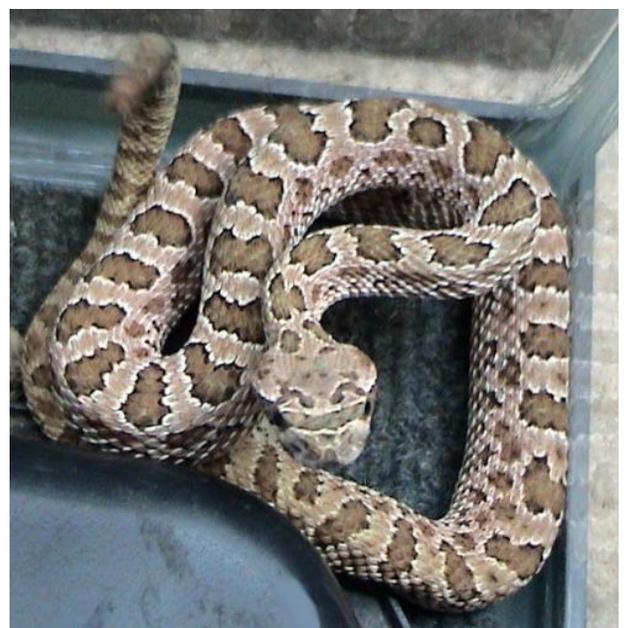
Bull snake



bull snakes look remarkably like a rattlesnake! But they are non-venomous constrictors.

I've seen rattlesnakes many, many times in the Front Range foothills, but haven't seen them on river trips. Yet. Oh, with one exception: on the rock panel at the river trailhead to the Rattlesnake Arches site, just a few miles downriver from the Loma put-in. Bill Ashworth shot this photo (next page); note the characteristic triangular heads. Rattlesnake rules: Watch where you step, every step; don't reach where you can't see; realize

Where to start? As we saw a snake on the Gunnison, I'll just jump right in with snakes and other creeper/crawlers. Snakes : Bull snakes are quite common in Colorado and I've seen them on the South Platte near Deckers from a boat as well as other non-river locations. Eric Hermann found a juvenile Bull at the rest room at Steamboat Rock on the Green last summer. At first glance



Rattlesnake

that 4 of 5 bites from adult rattlers will be venom-free as they don't want to waste venom on leathery old souls like you; don't use a tourniquet but do call for help if the bite area gets red, inflamed, and swollen.

Rock art on the trail to Rattlesnake Arches downriver from Loma on the Colorado. Photo by Bill Ashworth



On the Gunnison, Joan Lutz found a snake that had just eaten something the size of a mouse. The snake posed for several cameras; here is one shot:

Well-fed garter snake on the Gunnison, late April 2010



Theropod tracks on the Dolores



There is one group of animals that we go out of our way to find, but usually all we see are tracks and bones: dinosaurs. The North American Interior is a fine place, perhaps the best in the world, to find the right age and kind of exposed rocks. Conveniently, those rocks, and the trace fossils (tracks, usually) or body fossils (bones, usually) are often within easy walking distance of our rivers. Dinosaur research has grown explosively in the last 25-30 years, with new significant discoveries found every few months. The photo of tracks here show hand-sized 3-toed tracks from a small meat-eating dinosaur that walked on a mud-cracked newly exposed surface, possibly a river bottom drying out in early summer (see the large ripple marks?), probably looking for grubs and such.

Campsite on the Gunnison ... can you see the headwinds?



children and the elderly. It turns out our scorpion was probably a Northern desert hairy scorpion, *Hadrurus*, whose cousin the Giant desert hairy scorpion grows over five inches in southwest Colorado and points south....

Claret cup cactus blooming in Dominguez Canyon off the Gunnison River – photo by Joan Lutz



Continuing with the creepy-crawly theme: Flaming Gorge, camping after a long day of trout fishing (oh, and canoeing), hanging out by the fire when what should saunter in between my chair and my son's but a slender, pale scorpion about 2 inches long. It made its way across the sand to the shrubs and my son and I both had the same thoughts: IS MY TENT ZIPPED? Followed by "Exactly how much mortal danger are we in, technically?"

Turns out that Colorado/Utah scorpions can give you a nasty painful sting but they won't kill you. Now, you take some of your Arizona/ New Mexico scorpions and there you have something to worry about, lethality-wise: the Arizona Bark Scorpion is the one that is potentially a killer of

Northern desert hairy scorpion



Zip up your tents, boys and girls!

We see some pretty cool insects. Greg Brigham saw a large metallic green beetle on the Yampa Canyon trip, which was probably one of the ground beetles in the genus *Chlaenius* or *Calosoma*, which may translate from the Greek as 'My predatory larvae eat your leaf-munching caterpillars for lunch, literally.' OK, the truth is: *Calosoma* means 'beautiful body'. At least one of the green beetles was introduced on purpose from Europe to New England way back in 1905 to eat gypsy moth caterpillars (also imported on purpose) of which there has been an unfortunately large supply munching their way through the eastern forests. Beetles are a huge, diverse group of insects; there are roughly as

Green Ground Beetle, Yampa Canyon, July 2009, photo by Greg Brigham



many different known species of beetles as there are all species of all plants world-wide – about 300,000 to 350,000! Beetles all have hard wing-covers covering their flight wings, like a Lady Bug (really a beetle); True Bugs have just their soft membranous flight wings; True Bugs also have sucking mouth parts (to eat plants) while beetles have chomping mouth parts (to eat other insects, worms etc.). Ground beetles as a group are critical in controlling herbivorous insect populations both in the wild and in cultivated crop areas.

Another beetle we've grown quite fond of is the tamarisk beetle, *Diorhabda*, which was introduced just a few years ago in the Moab, Dinosaur National Monument, Grand Canyon

and elsewhere to control tamarisk, an ornamental plant introduced 200 years ago and planted by the millions in the US before we realized it was taking over our desert waterways and has become Public Enemy #1. On the other hand, in China, they must protect their valuable tamarisk plantings from the ravenous *Diorhabda* beetle which will defoliate the shrub!

And in one of those twists of fate, even though the tamarisk beetle has been successfully controlling tamarisk, the U.S. Department of Agriculture officials recently revoked Colorado's permits to move the beetles across state borders. The USDA also banned any release of the beetles in eight other Western states.

The orders were the result of a lawsuit filed by the Center for Biological Diversity and the Maricopa Audubon Society. The suit charged that the tamarisk leaf beetle is contributing to the decline of the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, which of course never used to nest in tamarisk before it became so widespread.

Flycatchers now nest in the invasive tamarisk because the species of native riparian trees in which they previously nested have been replaced by tamarisk and are no longer available. The Endangered Species Act requires that federal agencies not harm endangered species or their habitat and that they consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to formulate plans to avoid such harm.

Following the moratorium, the Center for Biological Diversity and Maricopa Audubon Society killed their legal challenge. "We are relieved that the program has decided to obey the law and will now consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service to prevent any further jeopardy to a

We're hoping Marsha Dougherty's photo of a lizard eating a grasshopper will be the cornerstone of an upcoming PBS Nature special ..



federally protected species. Our case will now be dismissed,” said attorney Matt Kenna of the Durango-based Western Environmental Law Center.

So, water those cottonwoods and hopefully the willows will return so the willow flycatcher can feel more at home.

The Wildlife on the Waterways series will be continued in later newsletters. Feel free to send contributions, written or photographic, to the editor. A BIG thank you to Karen Amundson for collecting and annotating many wildlife photos from her collection. You’ll see more of those in later parts of this series.

## Finding River Flow Levels

Jerry Nolan

Have you ever arrived at the put in for a river trip and found the river boiling and surging at a frightening level, or worse, found a damp river bed suitable only for insects? Hmmm, maybe should’ve checked the river level first? Nowadays, finding and understanding river flow gauges is an important skill for every paddler.

Mule deer near Echo Park on the Green River in Dinosaur, at fairly low cfs! T Jacklin.



Finding the river level is fairly simple. For Colorado Rivers: go to [USGS Streamflows for Colorado](#) ; for Utah Rivers: go to [USGS Streamflows for Utah](#); then click on [Statewide Streamflow Table](#). When the table appears, do a character search (ctrl-f in Windows) to find the river or location you want; for example, you could character-search for ‘Platte’ or ‘Dotsero’. Then just click on the site you want to get the data.

The “Daily Discharge” graph will give you an idea of whether the river is going up or down. If the river is new to you, then the question becomes, “What is the river like at that level?” To answer this question you’ll need to consult with other paddlers who are familiar with this river. Sometimes you can find this information from river guidebooks, either printed or online. Usually books will only tell you the levels at which the river is

suitable for boating and the river rating. To get the real juice, you need to talk with someone. Try to consult with someone of comparable boating skills to your own or someone who knows your boating skills. Beware the hot boater who tells you “piece of cake” or “fun” if you yourself are not a hot boater.

My favorite online river guidebooks are: [Coloradocanoetrails.info](http://Coloradocanoetrails.info) for western Colorado rivers, and [BLM Utah River Running Site](http://BLM Utah River Running Site) for Utah rivers.

## **Fruita to Westwater trip report**

### **Mat Bozek**

Karen A. was already in Grand Junction from an earlier trip, and we met at the Fruita rest area. It had rained all night Friday (another trip over the passes in blizzard conditions) and was still raining in the morning. We took our time and gave the rain a chance to stop, and surprisingly it did! It was cloudy and cool most of the day, but not very windy, so it was pleasant enough paddling. Sunday was really nice – clear sky and again, not very windy and nice temperature. This may well have been the least wind I’ve had on any trip there. Saturday afternoon/evening was threatening to thunderstorm, but the storm passed to the east of us – it apparently hit the Gunnison pretty hard, as the river was running chocolate milk thick on Sunday morning; I couldn’t see my white paddle blade at a depth past one inch.

For a mid-May nothing weekend, the river was fairly crowded with rafters (we were the only canoes, and didn’t see any kayakers) – I hadn’t really expected that, and hadn’t planned for it. We just stopped at Loma ramp as we paddled by, to register for a campsite, and there was only a single spot open – Mee 3. Karen asked a couple if we could share Mee Corner site with them, and they were agreeable, and nice, and quiet. There was one group of 3 or 4 rafts with pirate flags flying and some clown with a loud horn on one of them that kept making a lot of noise all the way down the river – glad we didn’t wind up close to them at camp. There was another raft with 3 guys that was trying to scam us into believing that they had signed up for Mee Corner (they hadn’t) – they eventually admitted that, and we told them we were just sharing with the party that had registered for it – they moved on and camped somewhere else.

The water level was really pretty nice – @7,000 cfs on Sat (11,500 was 50 yr average) and 8,000 on Sun (12,500 50yr avg) – I surmise that the low snowpack was encouraging water managers to fill the reservoirs. There was enough water to clear the gravel bars and keep a good fast flow, and enough water to cover the entry rapid at Black Rocks and turn that into a non-issue, but not so much as to make Black Rocks overly squirrely like it was in May, 2008 with 15,000 cfs. At that time, Black Rocks was kinda scary – we’d scouted it, and watching the big nasty whirlpools and upwelling surges, and figured out a sneak to avoid them. We had no problem this year. Saw some ducks and a few geese, and one nesting Bald Eagle pair.

In the BLM’s ongoing effort to reestablish cottonwood trees, they now have several 50 gallon barrels, with timers and drip hoses running to the small trees that they have planted. I guess maybe the volunteer bucket watering wasn’t working as well as they’d hoped. Kinda high-tech for out in the middle of nowhere.

If you’ve never used the Mee Corner site, you should consider it. It has trees and lots of decent tent sites, and there is a trail that goes about a mile from the camp over to Mee. There is also a nice 30 minute hike from camp that takes you up to the top of the rim. We did the canyon on Saturday, and the rim hike Sunday morning. Quite a lot of flowers blooming along both hikes. Mee #1 site was not too bad a site either – it had one tree, but it’s better than the rest of the Mee sites, I think.

## Rocky Mountain Canoe Club Information

### CLUB CONTACTS

|               |                          |
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### *Newsletter and submissions formatting, in brief:*

- Article titles: Arial bold, 14pt, dark blue; author: Ariel normal 12 pt; both left-justified; Sub headings: Arial Italic.
- Body: Times New Roman 12pt, black. Paragraphs block-style.
- Photos: 0.5 MB (500 KB) to 1 MB

***In This Issue:*** Swiftwater Rescue classes; Wildlife on the Waterways Part 1; Finding River Flow Information; Fruita to Westwater trip description

***Schedule of events:*** May trips: Niobrara, Dolores

**Membership:** \$20 per year, per household. See Membership section of our website for forms and information.

**ROCKY MOUNTAIN CANOE CLUB**  
**c/o Kathryn Mutz**



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