

Trip Report: Ruby-Horsethief – 3 day – September 26-28, 2021

Trip report by Kathryn Mutz with photographs by John McLean, Chet Pauls, and Kathryn Mutz

Having three RMCC events on the same stretch of river in the same weekend hints at the delight that the Ruby-Horsethief run offers!

Our three-day, two-night trip launched on Sunday about noon with one tandem canoe (Jerry and Louise), a solo canoe (John), a solo kayak (Janet), and a dory (Chet and Kathryn). Flows fluctuated a bit, but hovered around 2500 cfs – a gentle flow for the canoes/kayak and sufficient, but not generous, for the dory. The weather was perfect – warm (70s) during the days and easy sleeping in the low 50s at night.

Four of us started from Utah and two from Colorado, so we chose a later than usual meeting time (10:00am) – a fine choice to allow for driving and to avoid any major hubbub on the Loma ramp. But early enough to allow a leisurely float through Horsethief Canyon to Cottonwood 2 campsite, about 6 miles downriver, for our first night. Our first day included a few riffles and shallow spots with ever changing canyon walls. Our camp was huge, with large cottonwoods and sufficient landing space for our relatively low water level. Investigation of the area (by Chet) suggested that Cottonwood 5 (a bit downstream) and Banjo (just upstream of the Cottonwood set) would be excellent alternatives. Best wildlife of the day were kingfishers and turkeys, including a flock wandering the shore across from camp and on the hillside behind us. Smoked salmon, complements of John, and stories of bats, caving, ill-fated Deso-Gray portages, and other, more pleasant, boating experiences filled the evening camp circle.

Monday morning was relaxed with a 10:00am launch heading 10 miles to Black Rocks 2. We lunched in the Mee camp section of the river, but generally just moved slowly downriver with Louise/Jerry usually leading the pack and choosing the best channels (which got marginal for the dory in a few spots), and Chet/Kathryn or Janet as sweep. We arrived at camp in the early afternoon. Wildlife of the day included many Great blue herons and an eagle soaring and perching on the cliffs across river from camp. Our Black Rocks 2, at the upper end of the camps section, was a problematic landing for the dory (launching from the camp beach the following day would have been a challenge), so we landed the dory upstream of camp, set up our tent on the gravel bar (not bad!), and then joined the group at the campsite. John hiked to Moore Canyon, while Louise and Jerry lounged in camp. Janet, Chet and Kathryn hiked the blackrocks section – poking in and out of the wild formations and determining that BR 5, 7 and 9 would be great camps for a future trip. More camp conversation, no bugs, and great stars kept most of us enjoying the sunset and evening calm well after 8:30. ;-)

Tuesday was another relaxed start – about 9:00 – with an incredibly peaceful float through the blackrocks section. The smaller craft evaluated a landing and hike to see rockart at McDonald Canyon, but waved the dory past due to an unsuitable channel at the low flow. We considered hiking at Knowles Canyon but a touch of breeze suggested that heading downstream was our best plan. That proved wise as we hit a bit of w___ in the last hour of our journey. We arrived at Westwater (~8.5 miles) about 1:30 and were all heading home within an hour or so.

Darn nice trip!



Jerry and Louise



John



Janet



Chet and Kathryn

And the changing landscape of the canyons



Cottonwood 2 camp



Blackrocks 2 camp



Happy hikers in Blackrocks



