

Salida Bluegrass and Paddle - May 28-30, 2022

as reported by Karen A.

Friday had paddlers trickling in to Karen's property and steel-sided garage. Eventually we had a family of 3 tenting behind the garage, 1 on a tent site up the hill, 3 spread out in the garage and 1 sleeping in his van. Fran lives near downtown Salida and she had Latte from Amsterdam staying at her condo while bicycling from San Francisco to New York. Since Latte could not locate an empty campsite due to the holiday, she let Fran outfit her with an inflatable for the run from Stone Bridge to Salida.

Saturday 10 of us met at Stone Bridge and hopped on the river in our 4 tandem canoes and 2 inflatables. We had maybe gone a mile when we had our first flip. Reminder: PAINTER MUST BE OF FLOATING ROPE. This run turned out to be almost continuous class II+, and once we got the 2 swimmers reunited with their boat, they took a generous landowner's offer and moved the boat up 100' to house level by using his zip line. The nice couple even shuttled the wet pair and boat over to Stone Bridge. The rest of us continued down the river.

The landowner had warned us of a tough rapid where Squaw Creek joined the Arkansas, but we scouted it and all ran it successfully. We were doing pretty good until we got to the triple chute that circumvents a low head dam. There the pair who did the most thorough scouting was chewed up and spit out in the 1st drop of the chutes. Throw ropes and bailing devices were put to use. As we got to the water park, we whistled to warn kayakers of the big boats coming through. The first drop launched the lead boat into the air. The 2nd drop consumed the gorgeous kevlar boat as it was too hard to take the drop and immediately catch the boat ramp. So 3 out of 4 tandems flipped on this run and the inflatables were not bothered by anything.

We piled into the van that Fran had strategically placed there and went to retrieve our cars. We headed over to Mo Burrito and sat outside with our beers and/or food. Most people then headed over to the Bluegrass festival and enjoyed 2 especially good bands.

Sunday saw 4 of the guys go off to BV to do the Milk Run. 6th grader Joshua again paddled the bow and learned a couple of strokes from our Grand Canyon oarsman while his dad tried out Karen's solo canoe. A duckie rounded out the foursome, and there were no flips this time.

Meanwhile another foursome headed past Mt. Princeton Hot Springs to hike on an old railroad bed. This was a very pleasant hike with good views of the Chalk Cliffs and of Mt. Princeton. We all regrouped at the property and some of us went to the last 2 bluegrass bands, RapidGrass being the headliner.

While we had wanted to boat on Monday and the water levels above Granite were finally passing 300cfs, the weather forecast for Leadville was a winter snow scene and we rejected that. On the other end of the river, the Florence to Pueblo Reservoir run was a fast 1500cfs and not in the desired 700-1200cfs range. Several of us partied Sunday night and told tall (true) tales until midnight.

Monday morning we gradually got up, ate breakfast, and packed to head back to the Front Range. It snowed on us twice before we could break camp. Karen checked out possible put-ins downstream from

Florence to try and shorten that run for future paddling. But the only put-in available was where highway 115 crosses the river on the downstream end of Florence. It is a 20 mile run with no way to shorten it.

Note that this combination of paddling and bluegrass is hard to plan as water levels are not stable. We made the best of it, but had to do II+ level runs since our top choices were not cooperating. Note that 1 camera did not make it into the boat and the other 1 never made it out of its case; so there are no boating photos. You will have to be satisfied with shots of the bluegrass and the hike and garage scenes.





Hike near the Chalk Cliffs and then view of Mt. Princeton.



