

Lake Powell - San Juan Arm - August 25-31, 2023

as reported by Karen A.

Pre-Paddle (Day 0):

This report gives details on the Lake Powell - San Juan Arm houseboat and kayaking trip that 9 RMCC members did in the last week of August. Since we had purchased pre-boarding, we all arrived the day before departure. We checked in at the Wahweap Resort Boat Rentals, not the Marina. The trip avoided Bullfrog as in January it looked like water would be too low to launch houseboats there. I arrived at the boat rental office at 4:00 as they suggested, but they would not have a boat for us until 5. Then it would not be ready for some time. Finally we heard that it was brought in with a broken generator and a stick in the toilet!?! So they gave us a 59' Discovery which was 11' longer than the Navigator that we had reserved. It was not designed well for un/loading kayaks, but it was BIG. We could cruise at about 8mph.

Friday - Day 1:

We topped off gas at 8:15am and headed east. It was crowded in the south route near the dam and past Antelope Marina because "the Cut" was not deep enough to take houseboats per the 38% full lake level of 3575'. We passed Antelope Point and marvelled at the size of some of the private boats - - humongous, with 3 levels. We went about 56 miles to Forbidding Canyon and found a map-marked camp, but the access was too small for our big houseboat and we doubled back a mile to a decent beach at mile marker 48.

We had grilled fish and BBQ pork chops for dinner along with a fresh peach cobbler (the Dueckers brought a full case of Palisade peaches). 4 people tented outside. This was our coolest day with a high of about 90 degrees.

Saturday - Day 2:

We got an early start to avoid the mob of tourist boats that go to Rainbow Bridge. Karen went with Bev - who had a new inflatable kayak - and we did the 2 miles round trip to the entrance of Forbidding Canyon. The others did 3.5 miles to the muddy landing and then a 1 mile hike to the natural bridge; then returned. It is the largest 1 in the world, with a height of 290' and a span of 275'. This was better than the 13 mile round trip paddle that some of us did in 2015 from Oak Canyon to the natural bridge.

After the Bridge paddle/hike, we cruised up to the confluence and up the San Juan Arm

(SJA) all the way (20 miles) to Paiute Canyon. This camp had a landing and tent sites, but too many tumble weeds that we had to clear away with shovels. 3 of 4 anchor lines were tied off to boulders, including 1 huge 1 in the water that Christine tethered. Dinner was bison/chicken/veggie burgers and rice pudding. We spent 2 nights here; saw 2 black burros and 2 dark gray / white ones.

Sunday - Day 3:

Rob, Lin, and Karen hiked early - beat the heat - 1/2 mile to a view of the dry waterfall. And we could also see where the Paiute Creek came into the lake. Going was tough due to tumbleweeds, boulders, bushes and steep spots. Then the 3 of us paddled up to Neskahi Wash. Had lunch there and hiked to examine some trails. They were probably created by cows. Even though the Navajos had planned to do a marina between Paiute and Neskahi Canyons, none of the roads currently go to the lake; they are all ended about 3/4 of a mile away due to a somewhat vertical mesa top. Our plans to drive in to the SJA in the future were thwarted.

Meanwhile, everyone else - except for Bev who did some watercolor painting - went on an 18 mile paddle from our camp up into the Great Bend. They went through parts of the end of the lake with trash and branches and then through a mile of duff and finally got into some river current. Kit got very close to some burros. We had wonderful chili rellenos for dinner.

Monday - Day 4:

We loaded boats up and then barely could get the houseboat off of the bank. 2 nights with dropping water levels maybe needed an intermediate back up of a foot or 2. We cruised back down the SJA to Cha Canyon. Another boat had taken the closest landing to the mouth, so we took 2nd choice about a quarter mile away. I hung with Bev and read my book. The other 7 paddled back and explored Willson, Syncline, and Trail Canyons. Peter and Rob saw a coyote in Syncline. The Spaghetti Bolognese was delicious.

Tuesday - Day 5:

6 of us undertook an early hike up Cha, hoping to find the Navajo Art Gallery of petroglyphs. This many-faceted attempt had us struggling 1st on the south side of the creek above the high water mark, then dropping down near the creek. Rob went back to get his canoe and then Peter showed up. He and I crossed the creek and found what might have been a people trail (rather than burro) and then the Dueckers crossed to our side. It

got hot and steep at .6 miles from the Gallery. The guys continued, but Carol and I threw in the towel. We ran into Rob, told him to catch the other guys, and then took his solo canoe - both of us - back to camp. It was tippy and hard to steer with 2 people in it. In camp we gathered up several people to tie 3 kayaks to their boats and go meet the guys coming down. Peter and Werner found the Gallery and got good photos of a variety of rock art from multiple ages/tribes. It was in a luscious, big cottonwood grove with 3 very healthy looking horses. Surprisingly, Rob never could find the guys nor the Gallery nor the horses; only the cottonwoods. They were all happy to have kayaks to return in.

Moral of the story if we make another attempt to find the Gallery is to either camp at the mouth or kayak to get there, stay on the north side of the creek as much as possible, and get a very early start. We loaded up kayaks and cruised out of the SJA. We looked for a camp in Reflection Canyon. It was beautiful, but had no camps at this water level. Music Temple Canyon was too small for the houseboat to enter. So we found a good camp spot at the south end of Oak Canyon.

We all went for a swim party, did water ballet and joked around. Peter goaded me into doing a back dive and a back flip off the back of the houseboat. Peter slid all of the kayaks down the slide and all but mine stayed upright. Christine - our mermaid - chased them down and sent them to shore. Jack (or maybe Jacklyn) was a bird that joined our boat at the Paiute camp, stayed with us at Cha, and finally left us at Oak Canyon. Carol thinks it was a juvenile Cow Bird.

Carol and Werner cooked up a tasty, healthy chicken and shrimp stir fry with lots of vegetables. We went for a full moon paddle out and around the toilet dump station and back, and we were happy that Werner had turned on the red and green boat lights as it was pretty disorienting in the near-darkness. The destination was not romantic, but it was the right distance and unmistakable. The land reflected the moonlight, but the water was very dark. We had a nice campfire.

Wednesday - Day 6:

I baked a chocolate chip cake very early to avoid doing it in the heat of the day; and then we were under way at 9am. We all headed for Secret Oak Canyon and enjoyed its mile+ of twists and turns including a very narrow end section that required backing out for 200 yards. Bev headed back to the houseboat and the rest of us crossed the open lake to get to Twilight Canyon. This was a little bigger than Secret and took a couple of hours to do. Not enough time was left to do Anasazi Canyon so we headed back to the houseboat and

logged 9 miles total.

We loaded up the kayaks and went down lake for about 13 miles until we saw a nice beach at Friendship Cove that was about to be in full shade. We called it camp. There was a cool rock sculpture of a head that was about 80' tall. We had our 2nd campfire and turned in.

Thursday - Day 7:

Most of us hiked down to the rock sculpture and 3 people climbed to the base of the head. Anchors were brought on board and we pulled away from our final camp spot. We cruised for about 4 hours, with traffic getting thicker as we neared Wahweap. People seemed to have started the Labor Day Weekend early. 1 of the 2 motors stopped working about 2 miles short of the fuel dock. We had used 135 gallons of the 145 gallon gas tank, so figure it was not reaching for gas all the way to the bottom. Only 17 gallons were used for the generator. The Toy Boat tank acted as our backup fuel and we were happy not to need to transfer gas from there to the main tank.

The unload process went more smoothly than the initial load. A few people used the ATV pulling trailers for their gear ride to the cars, but most were happy enough with just using the hand carts. Cost of the trip was \$280/person initially when I paid for the boat, and then the gas, insurance, pre-board and miscellaneous items came to \$247 per person. So \$527 for a week long houseboat trip on Powell was a pretty good deal, partly due to a discount for paying in January for the houseboat. People left Page and headed for campgrounds or a motel or all the way to Golden for Peter and Christine.

Summary:

We met our goals - to paddle into the Great Bend where the San Juan River is coming in, to look for signs of any way to drive down to the SJA (none found), to introduce new people to houseboat/kayaking, and to have fun. The Rainbow bridge camp/paddle were a bonus.

It should be noted that Rob makes mincemeat of mice (caught 3) and is very helpful around the houseboat. Peter caused Christine and I to wince at his tales of Grand Canyon carnage; he guided there for many years. Werner drove the houseboat 80% of the time; made all of the landings without mishap, and got an ovation when he pulled into the fuel dock as smooth as butter on 1 engine. Peter and Werner were hauling up 70 pound kayaks almost every day. Carol - best dessert of peach cobbler, Christine - mermaid, Kit - endless energy, Lin - with tales of guys pissing out campfires, and I did what we could to un/load kayaks. Bev was our artist in residence, did short paddles, and gave away several

watercolor paintings.

The next Powell trip is likely to go out of Bullfrog and focus on the canyons near to the confluence of the Colorado and the San Juan Rivers. They are the most interesting and prettiest, and not very crowded.

PHOTOS - Taken by Kit, Bev, Carol, Rob, Christine and me:

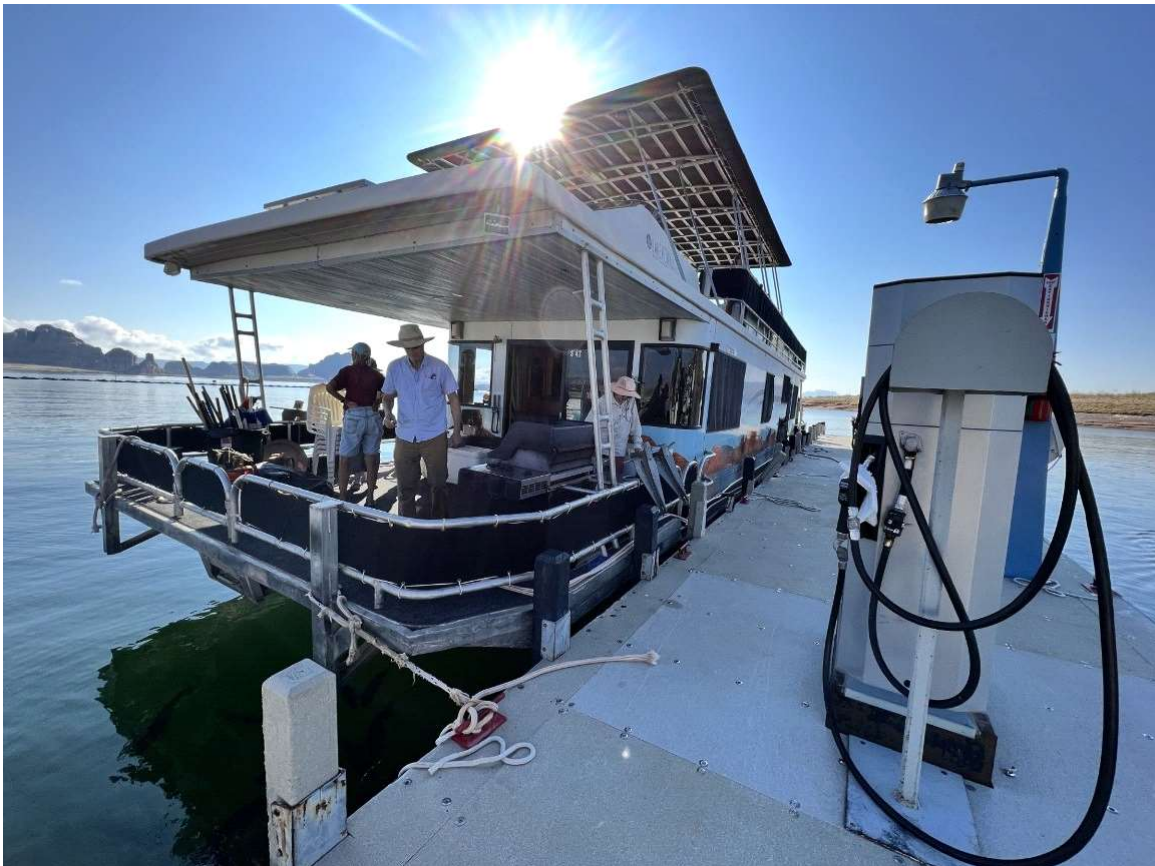
From Page, you go north over the bridge near the dam:



Then you drive to the Wahweap Resort area; it rained while loading the houseboat:



We top off the tanks:



Kit and Lin on the front deck; Lin at our 1st camp:



Peter and Christine's view of the 1st camp; Bev paddles by the houseboat:



Peter tries to fly a kite; Bev at the entrance to Forbidding Canyon:



Bev silhouetted; Carol's view of Rainbow Bridge:



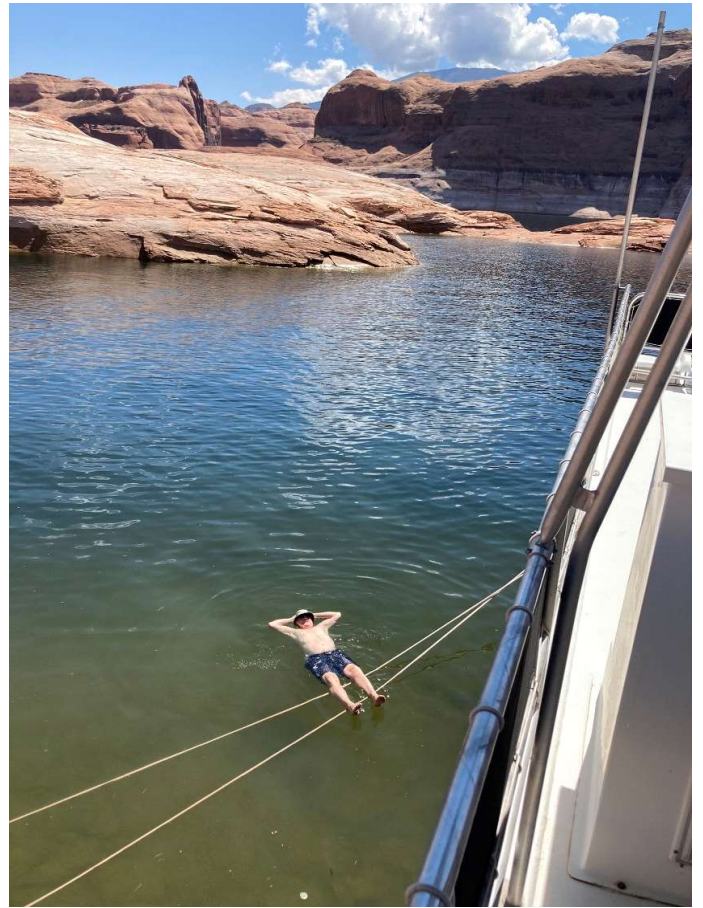
Rob's Bridge; Christine, Karen, Kit, Werner, Lin, Carol, Peter, and Rob (front) taken by Bev:



Loading a boat to the Upper Deck; impressive rock formation:



Werner driving the houseboat; Peter relaxing in water; gorgeous sunset at Paiute Cyn:



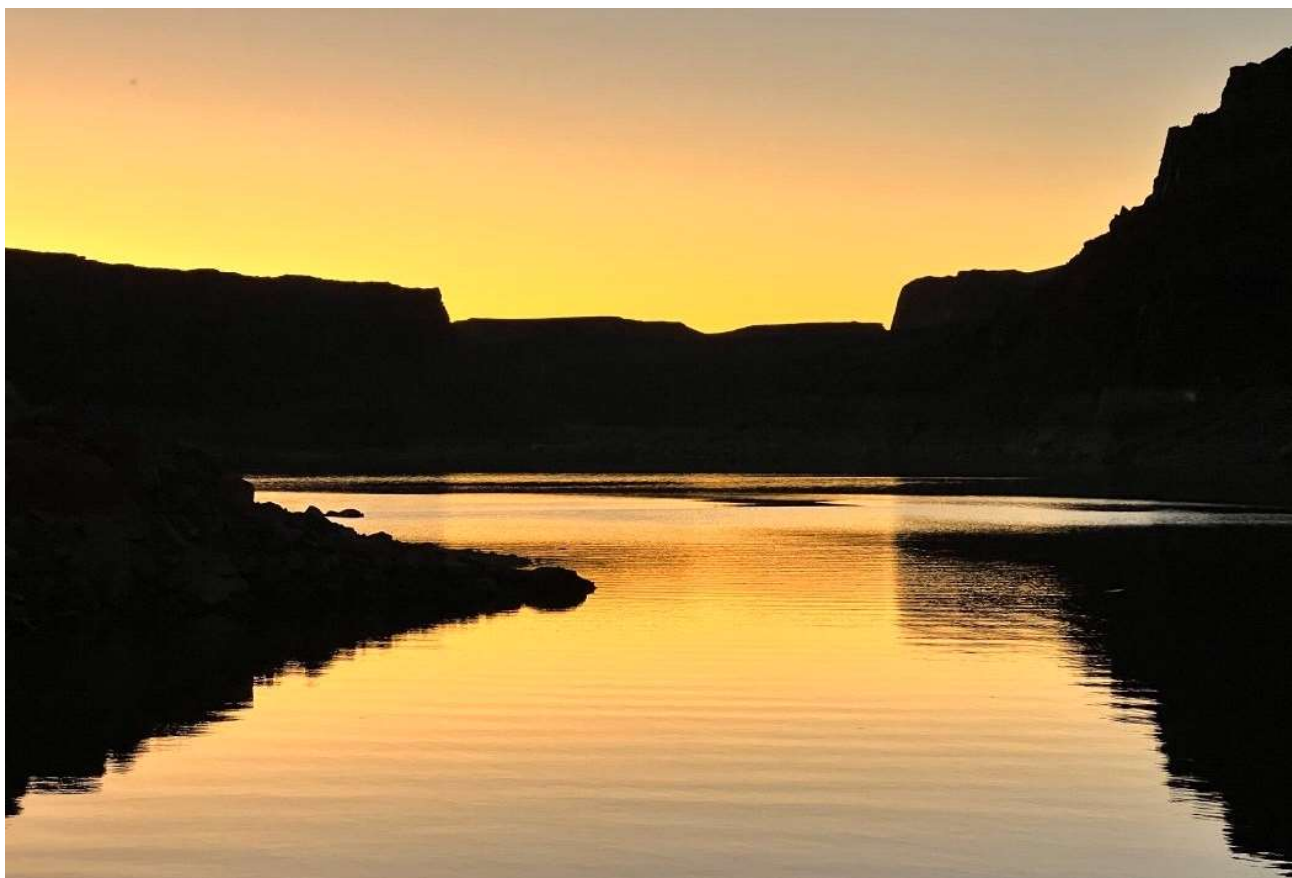
A Datura blossom; view up the San Juan Arm from our Paiute Canyon morning hike:



View up Paiute Canyon with Lin from the hike; the Great Bend area had lots of debris:



Approaching full moon; we had wonderful sunsets:



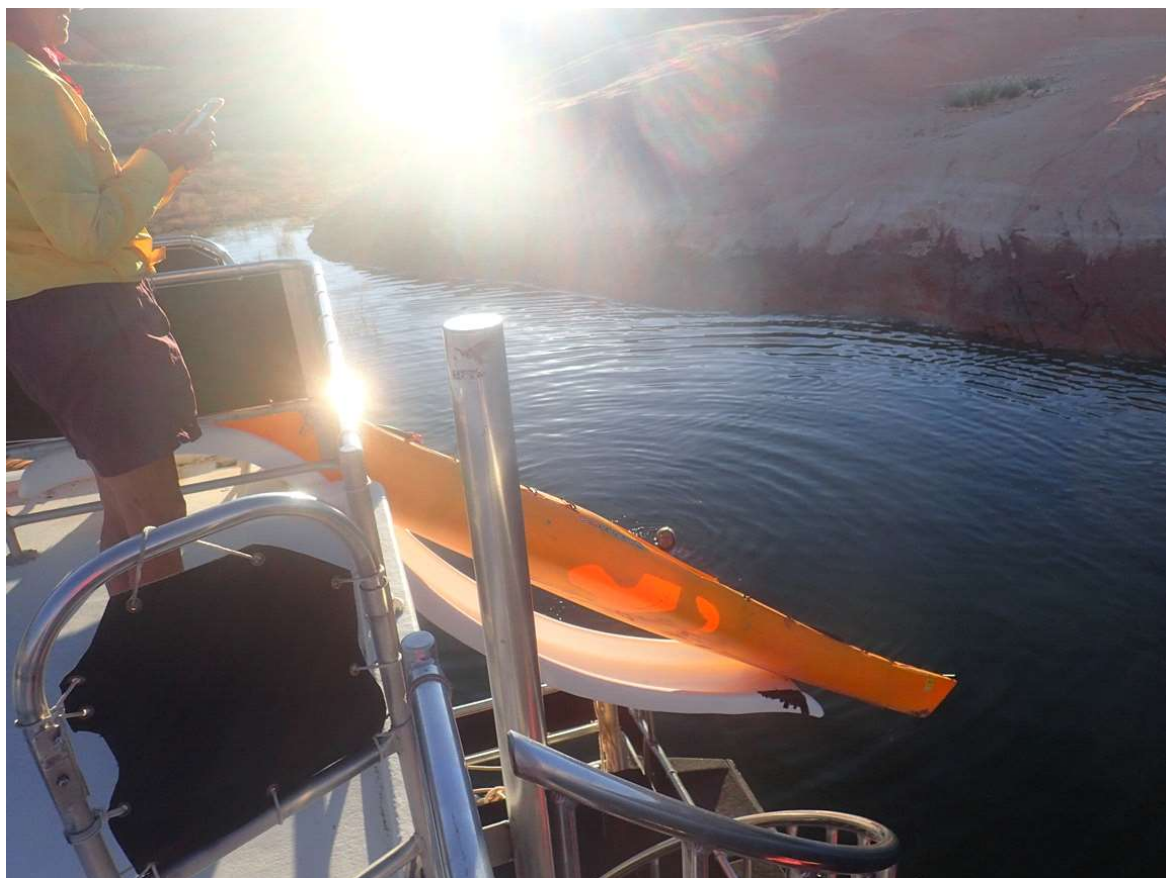
4 of 7 paddlers ready to explore Wilson, Syncline, and Trail Canyons; Kit enjoyed it too:



Peter, Bev, Christine, Werner, Carol enjoy the Upper Deck; Peter with triangle petroglyph:



Kit drives the houseboat; my kayak goes down the slide:



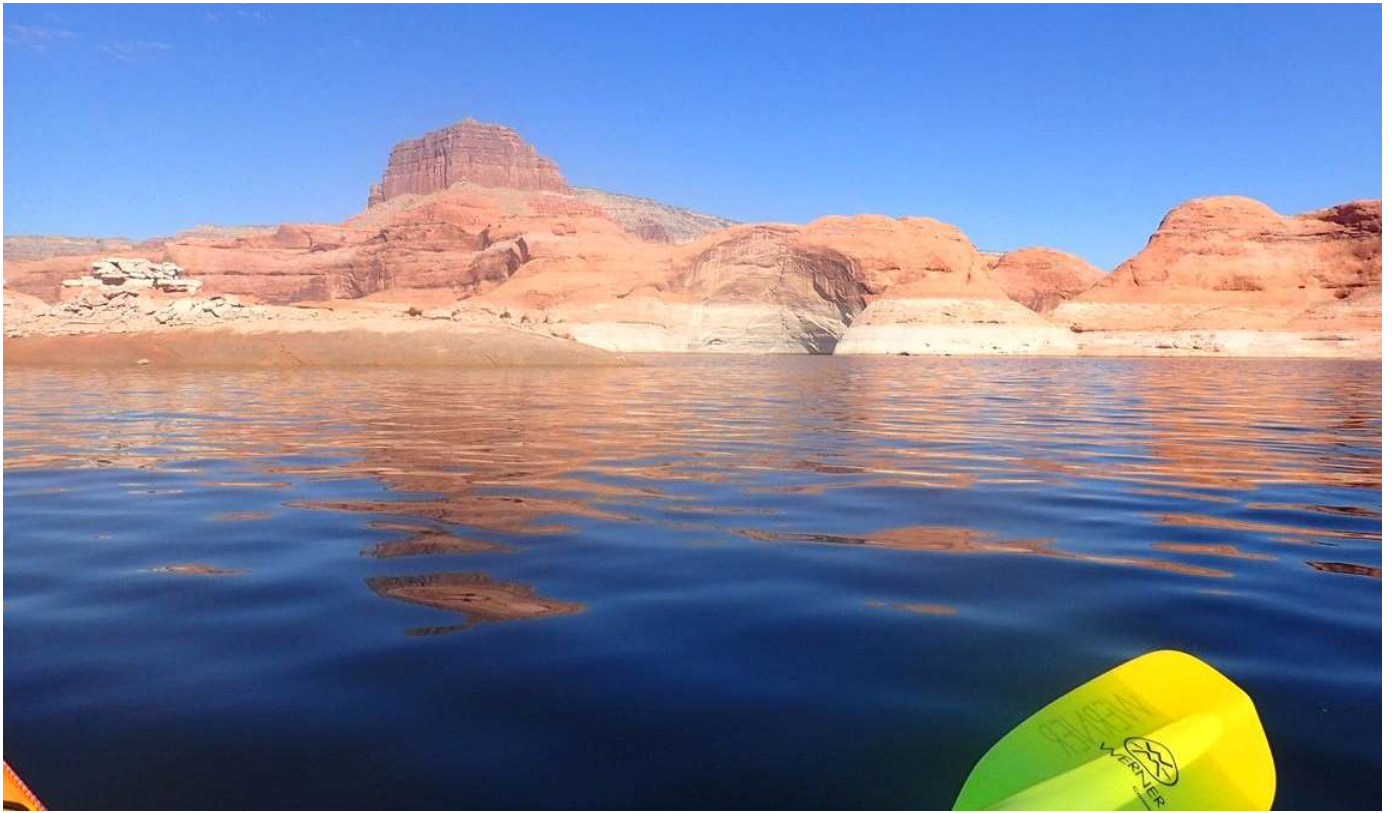
Lin with full moon; Christine's abstract shot of the full moon:



Deep in Secret Oak Canyon; people leaving Secret Oak Canyon:



Shadows are the entrance to Twilight Canyon; caves going into Twilight Canyon:



Deeper in Twilight Canyon; our head sculpture at Frindship Cove; Kit's 1am phone photo:



Rob and Peter at neck of head sculpture; houseboat in Friendship Cove:



