

Navajo Reservoir and Rivers – June 5-9, 2026

as reported by Karen A.

We had 2 small group camps reserved for 4 nights at Arboles Point Campground within Colorado's Navajo Lake State Park. It was sites 501 and 502 on a peninsula between where the Piedra and San Juan Rivers emptied into Navajo Reservoir. The junipers held a few tent pads, we had 2 vans and a camper, and the view to the west gave us good seating for colorful sunsets and Venus/Jupiter/Mercury sightings.

June 6:

We had a crazy combination of boats go from Cottonwood Access (in the state park) down the San Juan and across some lake to land at our campground. Russell and Karen D. were on SUP's, Neddie on a short sea kayak, Susan on a fishing kayak and Penelope/me in a short tandem canoe. Scenery was delightful, but the fairly low – 300cfs – water made us line boats around strainers and to deep enough braided water a couple of times. The SUP fins were hitting too many rocks, so Karen removed hers (it was longer than Russell's) and it decreased her steering control; it put her in the drink when she got into willows. That was the only "flip".

Carol and Werner took their long sea kayaks over toward the Piedra; then they headed up the San Juan arm and ran into us coming down. We enjoyed seeing a group of cormorants and eventually picked paths onto our peninsula and wheeled into camp.

We got fairly big winds every late afternoon in camp and found the east side of our junipers gave enough shelter to cook and safely do Dutch Ovens. The potlucks for 3 nights did not disappoint. Carol played her mandolin and a couple of us did some drumming on various footrests and a metal sign (cymbal).

June 7:

The 2nd day paddle had Deni/Merlin from Pagosa Springs meeting us at the Juanita Road bridge and we put in at a spot marked for Southern Ute Reservation fishing a mile up the road. We had all gotten our 2 day Ute Fishing (\$20) or Guest (\$5) licenses online as that was the only way we were allowed to boat. Anne F., Merlin and I had scouted the rivers in February and views from the road and on GoogleMaps had us thinking it was Class I, but we found it to be more of a Class II away from the road and at the low water level.

In the 1st 1.4 river miles we got water into 2 boats twice and had to bail. By the time we got to the Juanita Bridge we let 2 people and 1 boat leave the party and they retrieved the 2 put-in cars. Meanwhile Deni/Merlin, Susan and I continued to a good lunch spot where a guy was fishing and a woman collected cactus. She pointed out a rock formation named The Witch and it really looked like a witch's head. We saw a golden eagle as well as 4 gorgeous horses trotting

across the river. We arrived at our takeout near Pagosa Junction just 2 minutes after the 2 that retrieved cars. It was a delightful run (now at 270cfs), but tricky with the lower water.

Also on the 2nd paddle day Carol and Werner drove to Frances Canyon on the far southeast side of the reservoir. They explored a ruin and petroglyphs that were hard to drive to. Both of them are very active members of a Utah archaeology club.

June 8:

Our number of people for the Pagosa Junction to Cottonwood Access section had dwindled (Susan left to babysit grandkids) and enthusiasm for a 3rd uncharted paddle had subsided. Also the river was down to 220cfs, so the season for boating south of Pagosa Springs had ended. Susan is the only person who actually fished. But she had no luck. Neddie, Penelope and I went to Chimney Rock and had an excellent guided tour. We got all the way up to the upper kiva and to the viewpoint for the various sun and moon sightings between the chimney rock and its nearby guardian warrior tower.

Carol and Werner went to the Casino in Ignacio. The Southern Ute Museum there was closed on Mondays. Maybe next time. While sitting with our West view we spotted bald eagles a few times, an osprey, and a high flying flock of "dinosaur birds". They were too high to identify.

June 9:

We got a light rain the 4th morning. All but 1 tent were already down, so we were happy that the vegetation was getting a drink. The Ute fishing licenses add work and \$ to the paddling on their sections of river, and if we do it again we will call it a class II. With more water the San Juan would scrape boats less and the last 6 miles of the Piedra would be worth running too.

The view up the San Juan from camp site 504:





The Cottonwood Access put-in was rather tricky:







Our lunch spot:





2nd paddle day; bridge before the confluence with the Navajo River:



Take-out near Pagosa Junction was "marked" with a red car:











Chimney Rock was cool.....



