

San Juan River from Montezuma Creek to Sand Island – June 3-5, 2026 as reported by Karen A.

6 of us converged on the Sand Island Campground near Bluff, UT and didn't easily find each other right away as it is a large campground and the text messaging can be iffy there. Boaters included Rebecca (Cheyenne), Ron (Estes Park), Neddie (Arvada), Penelope (Denver), Deni (Pagosa Springs), and me (Salida). We ended up in 2 large treed sites on the west end where bridge traffic can be a little noisy. 3 of us visited the large number of petroglyphs in the northwest corner of camp.

Footbridge to Sand Island Ramp – June 4:

Due to expected 98 degree temperatures and variable water levels, we started by driving cars to the Footbridge and doing the shuttle. We then ferried over to the Navajo (left bank, South) side and started our hike before it could get too hot. We walked along on a 2 track called Footbridge Road and kept to the left at a "T". The right road had gone back to nature and the house with goats and alpacas in 2013 was abandoned. Added fencing and water pipes blocked our way making the advertised 1.1 miles grow, so we found a couple of fence squeezes to keep the distance down. After a while we found a picnic table and a 1 hole outhouse missing its door and soon got to the base of Casa del Eco.

We missed the easiest trail and climbed up into the overhanging cave area (like several Mesa Verde ruins) on 2 so-so trails. 3 of us got to the top where the base of the 17 room ruin sat. It was then that we spotted the easiest trail (it started near the outhouse) and saved it for the climb down. Using 4 carved hand-foot holes we got up and inside the structure. The rock/mud work was nice and there were at least 2 sets of pictographs – mainly hand prints and dots that had some meaning hundreds of years ago.

Our shortcut back to the footbridge followed cow paths through a dry bush area along with the 2 track. We ate lunch and hopped on the river. There was no sign of any more Indian structures and even Bluff was hidden away behind thick riverine brush. Sandstone bluffs were picturesque. We landed on the well-used ramp at Sand Island.

Back in camp we cleaned up and drove to the Comb Ridge Eat and Drink restaurant for dinner on the gravel patio. Food and conversation were quite good. Back in camp Deni's dog Bluey entertained us by climbing 4' up a tree. It was too hot for a campfire, but stories were told.

Montezuma Creek to the Footbridge – June 5:

Early on the 5th we drove to the Footbridge, dropped Ron's car (he could carry 5 people) and put in near the High School in the town of Montezuma Creek. Scenery and wildlife were even

better than the prior day. We saw a red-tailed hawk, wild turkeys, blue herons and many smaller birds and waterfowl. During lunch we named the trip “5 Chicks and a white-legged Dude”. The Footbridge takeout had been marked by a colorful swimsuit and we landed 1 boat at a time and crawled up the bank. We shuttled to retrieve cars, loaded up the boats and said farewell to Ron (he had company coming) and Rebecca (she had to get home to her horses as pet sitters could not be found). The rest of us continued to the north end of the Navajo Reservoir for another paddle trip.

This may be our last canoe trip to Casa del Eco as the hike from the river has gotten long and the best trail up is hard to find. It worked out well to camp at Sand Island 2 nights rather than packing our canoes and camping near the Footbridge.

Bluey is with the “h” shaped pipe which is all that remains of the washed away Footbridge:



















Dinner at Comb Ridge Eat and Drink in Bluff:



At the Montezuma Creek put-in, down from the High School:











