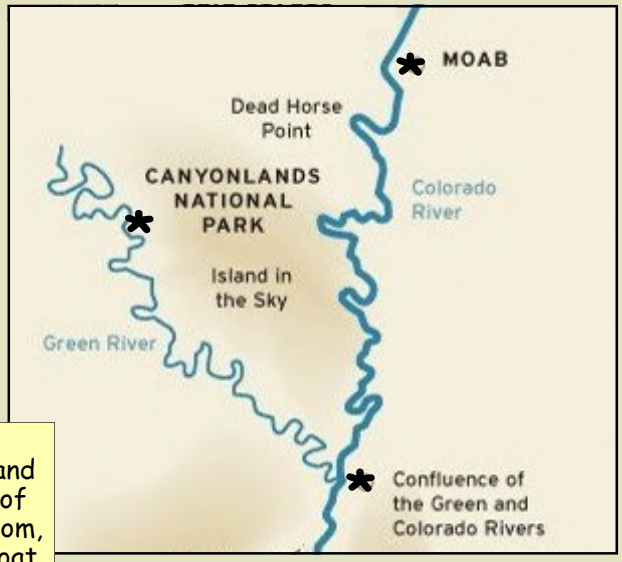
# Green River, 2023

## Mineral Bottom to Spanish Bottom

By Patrick Reardon




**Editor's Note:** This summer's group, as in 2016, 2019 and 2021, launched from Mineral Bottom (the star at the left of the map) and paddled past the Confluence to Spanish Bottom, where they were picked up and returned to Moab by jet boat.

If you're not familiar with this area, there is a summary of place names and basics at the end of Patrick's report, with his list of Trip 2023's camping spots and daily mileage.

The author, with Tim, Annabel and John

Below is my summary of the RMSKC Green River 2023 trip, my first self-supported kayak camping trip. It was a great experience both from a being organized point of view and from a being out in the wilderness point of view. If you like camping you'll love this trip.

**Day I, September 21:** At 8:00AM all the participants (Leader Tim Fletcher, John Anderson and Annabel Saunders, Gary Cage and Anne Fiore, and I) met at Tex's Riverway in Moab on the first day of the trip. All were excited about the upcoming adventure. Tex's guides loaded our kayaks and gear in an orderly fashion to make it easy to disembark at Mineral Bottom.

Annabel and Gary at the Mineral Bottom put-in

The van ride to Mineral Bottom from Moab was about 90 minutes through rough desert terrain. We knew we were entering territory that was isolated from civilization. Hence, being self-supporting was critical on this trip. Our driver was experienced in the navigation of the curves we traveled in our descent of many thousands of feet so we all were confident we would make it to the bottom to start our journey.

At Mineral Bottom we unloaded our kayaks and gear for the journey. It took us some time so we let the canoeists who'd ridden down with us have first go at entering the water. We noticed two of them had an overpacked canoe with gear stacked a little too high. More on that later.

As we entered the water, we all grouped up for instruction from Tim Fletcher, our lead. After his directions about always keeping together we started our journey. I have to admit the first time in the water at Mineral Bottom was AWESOME. The put-in was across from Tidwell Bottom in Labyrinth Canyon which was majestic. No pictures can give you the feeling that you are experiencing in Real Time. We sat in our kayaks to absorb the feeling for a few minutes before starting.

We started our paddle with Tim in the lead and looked at all the canyons one after the other. As we turned one of the curves of the river we hit a strong head wind. Our group started to spread out a little as we paddled the winds.

We notice the overpacked canoeists on the side of the river. Apparently the wind caught their high profile coolers and capsized their canoe. We stopped to render assistance and found out they had lots of experience on the Green River and were OK. They were going to wait for the wind to die down and continue their journey. So we continued on in the wind at a good pace.

Downriver of Mineral Bottom on the first day

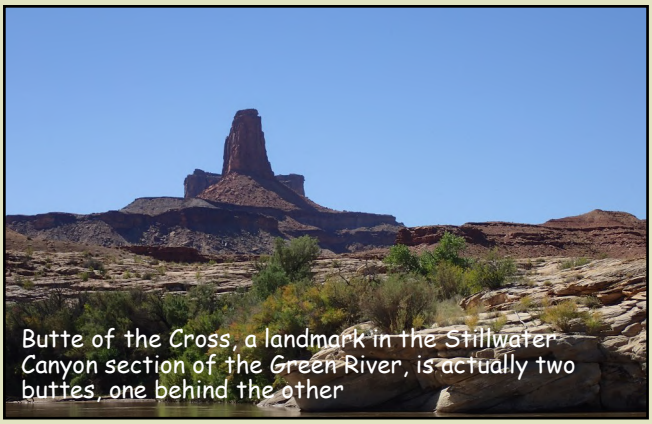
View from the first campsite at Tent Bottom, early the morning of Day II

We paddled past Saddle Horse Bottom, Upheaval Bottom, Hardscrabble Bottom and Fort Bottom where we thought about camping, but there were other campers so we needed to move down the river a bit to **Tent Bottom**. Tim and John found a nice spot to camp there.

Our camping strategy after that would be to get an early morning start each morning to have first pick on future campsites. Apparently the end of September is a popular time to paddle the Green River. It's easy to see why: the weather was extraordinarily nice to us with very little rain or mud, and the sun was plentiful with moderate temperatures.

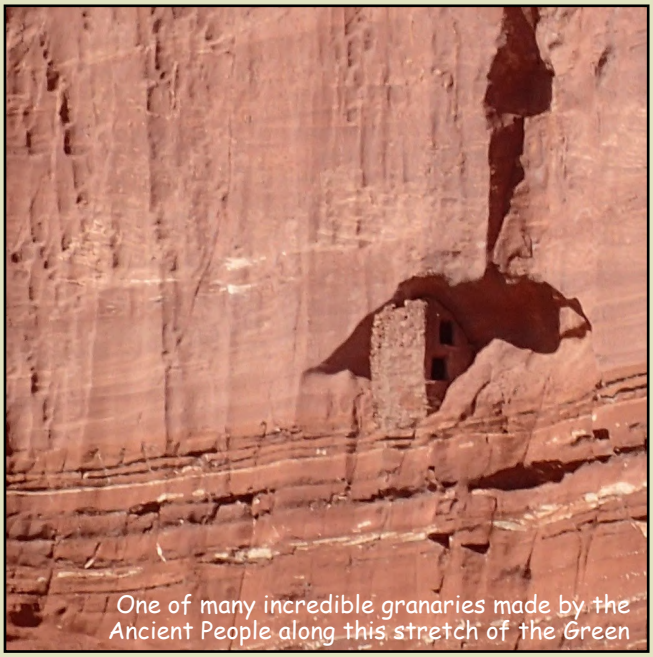
Each day there were different views of the canyons and different types of campsites. Some were just a sandbar while others were a small beach for anchoring our kayaks and then climbing a little to spots that had trees and boulders to support a comfortable camping experience. If you do decide to paddle Green River, be prepared to like sand. During the afternoons, winds can be gusty blowing it everywhere especially on the sandbars. I did notice we all had patience and waited the winds out before pitching our tents.

**DAY II, SEPTEMBER 22:** After leaving Tent Bottom we set our goal to camp out on Anderson Bottom. We passed Tower Park, Potato Bottom, Beaver Bottom on the right through Millard Canyon towards Anderson Bottom. Once we finally arrived there the first sandbar was taken by a couple of canoeists. We continued on to round **Bonita Bend** and found an excellent campsite and pitched camp at Bonita. That evening we decided to leave even earlier the next morning to ensure we could get the best campsite available. By now I was an expert at pitching my tent, setting up camp and breaking it down for early morning exits. Our typical wake up time was 5:45AM with a launch time of on or before 0800 to get a good head start. Tim volunteered to provide reveille to anyone that needed it. Thank you, Tim! I did not have a watch and just looked for the light to come on in his tent.



Butte of the Cross, a landmark in the Stillwater Canyon section of the Green River, is actually two buttes, one behind the other

**DAY III, SEPTEMBER 23:** We started early the next day by continuing rounding Bonita Bend toward Turks Head past Soda Springs Canyon. The river was calm with lots of sights, canyons, cliffs and ruins of old natural silos to store grain and corn. At this point we came across the ruins at Jasper Canyon. You have to look closely to see it. We camped that night at **Island Sand Bar.**



One of many incredible granaries made by the Ancient People along this stretch of the Green

**DAY IV, SEPTEMBER 24:** After Jasper Canyon we looked to find a campsite before the last day of our trip. We saw a canoe at the Stove Campsite, which has access to the Honaker Trail, so we decided to camp on a very large **Sandbar across from Stove**.

That afternoon after setting up camp our neighbors from the Stove campsite ferried over to us to say hello. They had just returned from a hike up Honaker Trail to see the Confluence from the top of the canyon. The hike has an elevation gain of about 1000 feet and is about three miles long; it's something to consider next time.

**Day V, September 25:** The next morning we started the last leg of our journey. It was decided that John and Tim would scout out the next campsite at Spanish Bottom. We all started together, with John and Tim paddling ahead to find the best campsite.

On the way, I had my first experience with a riffle and it was fun. Annabel was kind enough to give me some guidance about paddling through the riffle and following the person in front. Good advice, it worked out fine.

After the riffle we paddled to meet up with the Colorado River at the Confluence and found the Upper Spanish Bottom campsite. John investigated the Lower Bottom campsite and it was decided to stay at the upper one.

We pulled our kayaks ashore and began moving our gear up a hill to the campsites. After we finished setting up camp, other campers arrived, finishing their journey, too. The Upper Spanish Bottom had many campsites so we encouraged the canoeists to join us.

That evening we conversed with our new neighbors. One couple was from Manitoba, Canada, and the other was from Pennsylvania. The couple from Canada mentioned the Green River trip was on their bucket list. Done.

In the evening around 8:30PM we watched the Starlink Satellites line up and shoot across the sky in a straight line like ducks in a row. That was an amazing sight along with the textured silhouette of the Canyon from the almost full moon's moonlight. We ended each evening with some short stories and looking at the stars and moonlight reflecting from the canyon walls.

**Day VI, September 26:** The final morning at Spanish Bottom was typical camp roll up and getting ready for our trip back to civilization. The day before we had cleaned our kayaks by washing them down with river water and removing all of our gear so they were ready to go once the jet boat arrived.

That morning we could hear the boat approach as the roar of its engines became louder. By then everyone was ready with our gear all packed up. The boat arrived and the guides systematically loaded our kayaks and gear. They have a great system of checks and balances which allows us to load efficiently with no gear left behind. Of course, we were all wearing our PFDs on the jet boat transit just in case an incident happened during transit back to Potash.

The jetboat, with some kayaks loaded

Foreground: Annabel and John; back: Patrick and Tim

When arriving at Potash, we left our gear on the boat and disembarked to a waiting bus. The bus brought us back to the Tex's Riverway starting point where we collected our gear and boats from the jet boat. At this point it was time to pack our cars and head for home.

My conclusion is that the Green River trip is a very doable trip as long as the participant is well prepared with all the needed gear, and has practiced packing their kayak with their gear and supplies. Here is a list of our campsites and daily mileage:

- Day I, Thursday, September 21: Mineral Bottom at Mile 52.1 to Tent Bottom at 39.5. Total: 12.6 miles
- Day II, Friday, September 22: 39.5 to Sand Bar near Bonita Bend, River Mile 30.2. Total: 9.3 miles
- Day III, Saturday, September 23: River Mile 30.2 to Island Sand Bar at 15.3. Total: 14.9 miles
- Day IV, Sunday, September 24: 15.3 to Stove Camp at River Mile 7. Total: 8.3 miles
- Day V, Monday, September 25: River Mile 7 through the Confluence, to Upper Spanish Bottom Camp on the Colorado River, River Mile 213.7. Total: 9.7 miles
- Day VI, Tuesday, September 26: Pick-up; jet boat back up the Colorado River to Potash (near Moab)

*Most photos in this article by Anne Fiore*

## Place Names Explained

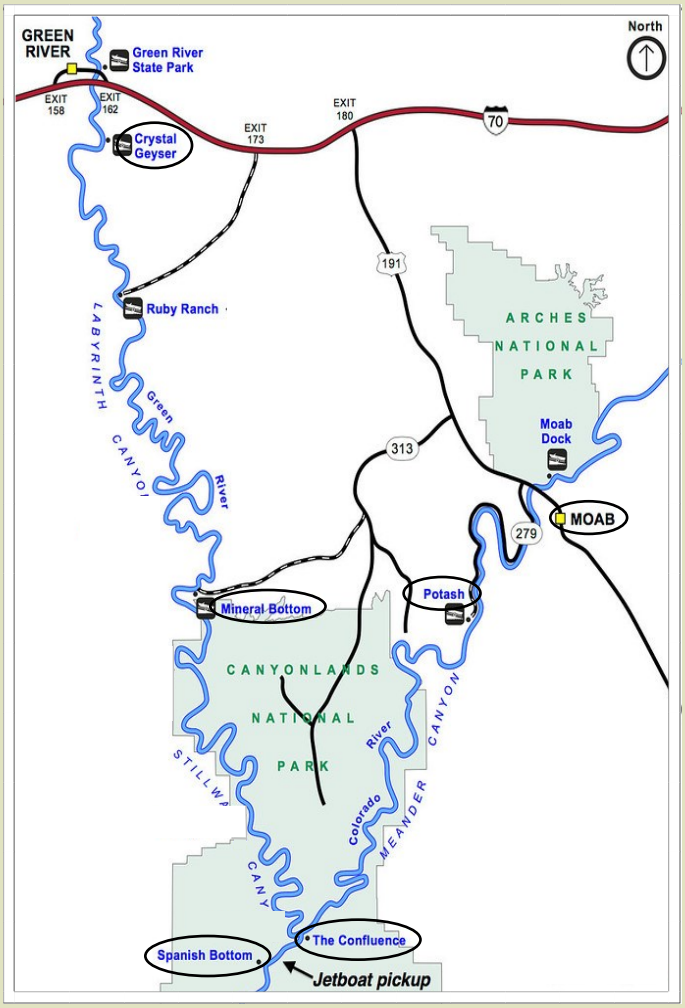
People throw the names of these places around like everyone knows them; it can be confusing. Here's the scoop:

The *Green River* to the west and the *Colorado River* east of it meet southwest of Moab at *The Confluence.*

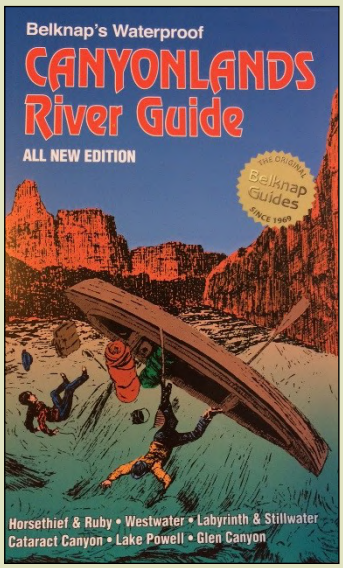
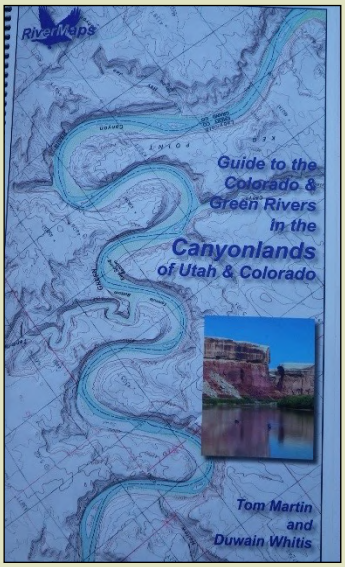
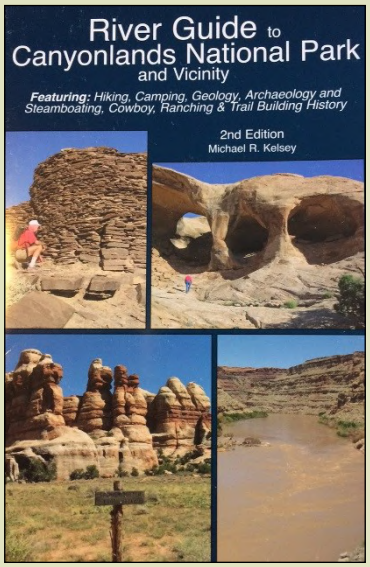
The upper portion of the Green runs through *Labyrinth Canyon.* People usually put in at *Crystal Geyser* south of the town of Green River. The take-out is at *Mineral Bottom*, west of Moab.

The lower portion of the Green, often referred to as *Stillwater Canyon,* goes from below Mineral Bottom to just past where the Green joins the Colorado.

People paddling that section, or the portion of the Colorado River southwest of Moab, hire a jet boat to shuttle them from Spanish Bottom back up the Colorado to Potash, and from there to Moab.




**Previous Green River and Colorado River trip reports** are fun to read; you'll find them archived under "Articles, General" in the Publication section of the RMSKC website: http://www.rmskc.org/articles--general-1.html

**Other Resources:** Some Green River paddlers have used *Belknap's Canyonlands River Guide*, which is on waterproof paper and when protected in a Ziploc bag is not damaged by being carried under a spray skirt strap or bungee.

Tim uses Martin and Whitis's *Guide to the Colorado & Green Rivers in the Canyonlands of Utah & Colorado*, which had more detailed maps. Michael Kelsey wrote the book people use for Lake Powell. His *River Guide to Canyonlands National Park and Vicinity* provides the same sort of resource for this area's history and memorable stories.