

Loma to Westwater

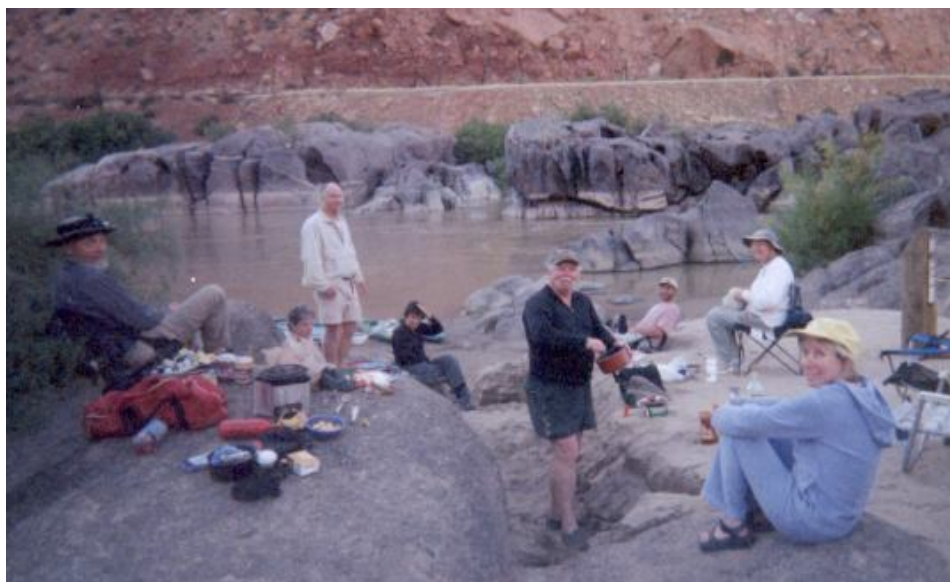
By Carole Kline

It was a perfect Colorado fall weekend; sapphire blue skies, golden aspen and warm weather. This year's Loma to Westwater Colorado River trip had plenty of lovely scenery with a bit of adversity thrown in just to make it interesting.

The trip leader this year was my husband and your club president, Larry Kline. Larry worked hard to organize the trip and to make sure that all members participating were well prepared for what the river might throw in our direction. Although promoted as a beginner level river trip, some degree of proficiency with basic paddling skills was essential. Most important was the ability to do a wet exit and self rescue, as I found out during this trip.

A pre-trip meeting at our home got everyone organized around food, transportation, meeting places, etc. Joining the trip this year were Jay Gingrich, Ann Stevens, Marsha Dougherty, Wanda Bravdica, Brian Curtis, and Ann Whitely and Rick Morrison.

We all met up at the boat ramp at Colorado State Park in Fruita on Saturday morning. The river was running at 5500 cfs that morning, but had been running as high as 7000 cfs 2 days prior. After the shuttle to Westwater was completed and everyone's boats packed, we all set off down the river. The current moved us along at a brisk pace of 4 mph making it easy to relax, enjoy the scenery and let the river move you along. We camped out at Cottonwood Meadows the first night after a short hike up Rattlesnake Canyon. Bird lovers got to view several blue heron's along the way. During the night I heard two owls calling to each



Black Rocks campground
(photo by Marsha Dougherty)

other throughout most of the night. In the morning I found out that I was the only one on the trip suffering from insomnia since no one else heard the owls.

Day 2 was the dreaded Black Rocks crossing. Tales of this part of the river have haunted me since I first joined the club. The stories of kayakers capsizing amidst the rapids had me quite nervous. Following a lunch stop, I was the first to capsize. I was practicing an eddy turn maneuver that Jay had discussed earlier and over compensated in the opposite direction. Thanks to Larry for nagging me all summer and making me practice wet exit and self rescue techniques. Jay was quickly at my side to help pull me to shore, with Larry rescuing my paddle. The good news was that no one panicked and the rescue was quick and efficient. Larry said he heard me laughing after I capsized so he knew I was alright. Thank you Jay!!

Off we went down the river to Black Rocks. After having some difficulties with the fast moving currents again, farther downstream, I decided to portage Black Rocks. The rest of the group decided to go

through. Larry and Jay went first and waited to make sure the rest of the group got through. First up, Rick attempted but got caught up on a rock. After Rick's difficult situation was resolved, Jay wisely suggested that the rest of the group portage. All in all, it took us 3 hours to go half a mile through Black Rocks. Whew!!!!!!!

We camped just below Black Rocks on our last night. Rick was the head chef for our delicious Mexican meal. I did not hear the owls that night, but did hear a couple of trains come storming through the canyon.

Strong headwinds made our last day on the river a bit more challenging. Although not difficult technically, we all had to dig deep and use efficient paddling strokes to get to the Westwater boat ramp. No time to watch birds today, a weather system was moving in, and the winds would not get any lighter.

Overall, it was a great trip. I would recommend it again, but make sure you have good boat handling abilities on a river and think once or twice about going if the river is running above 2500 cfs.