

Downstream view from the saddle
at Bowknot Bend; see arrow on the map below

LABYRINTH CANYON

SEPTEMBER 2018

By Sue Hughes

EDITOR'S NOTE: The names of these places can be confusing; here's the scoop: The *Green River* to the west and the *Colorado* east of it meet southwest of Moab, just off this map, 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 Mineral Bottom to the Confluence. People paddling that section, or the Colorado River southwest of Moab, hire a jet boat to shuttle them back to town.

Labyrinth Canyon 2018 was the third of Tim Fletcher's wonderful river trips in Utah's Red Rocks country. We spent an extra day on the water, but the format was similar to the 2016 trip on the lower Green from Mineral Bottom to the Confluence [*Mountain Paddler* 24-2b] and 2017's paddle down the Colorado from Moab to the Confluence [*Mountain Paddler* 25-2b].



As before, Tex's Riverways in Moab ran our shuttle. They took us by van to the put-in at Crystal Geyser, south of the town of Green River, Utah. But instead of coming back upstream by jet boat, we were met at Mineral Bottom and driven to Moab. Going uphill, the winding road didn't seem as "third world" scary as going down it had in 2016, but the wrecked cars used as filler were easier to spot, and just as disconcerting.

DAY I, SEPTEMBER 9: We camped overnight in Moab and arrived at Tex's at 8:00. Most of us were old hands, and we'd all paid in advance, so loading everything onto the van and getting on the road didn't take long.

On the ride up to Crystal Geyser, Kenny, our loader and driver and the soon-to-be new owner of Tex's, suggested that the upper part of the river was the least interesting and that we should make as many miles as possible that first day.

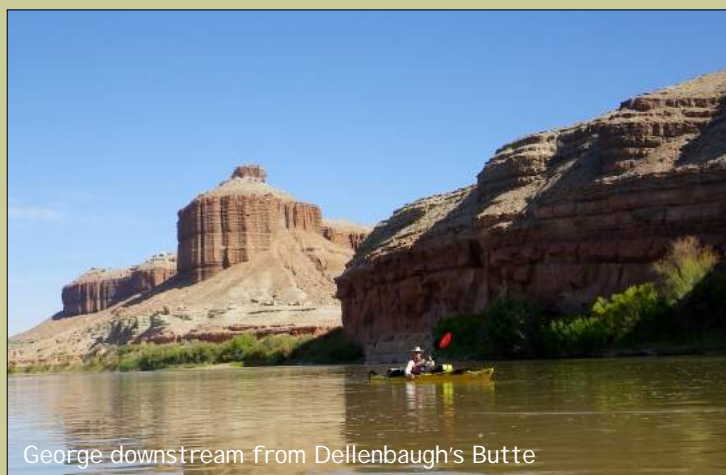


It seems slower packing the boat the first time back on the water, but we got going by 11:30 and made about 13 miles. The river was down, so we encountered more riffles than we ever had before, and all of us ran aground on a sandbar at least once.

We looked at a couple of possibilities before stopping at a very satisfactory large camp at river mile 101.9 by Dry Lake Wash. It had plenty of protected tent sites in the scrub, and a circle of cottonwood trees made a dining area.

Brian discovered a prehistoric piece of chert or quartz that had clearly been worked. We were sorry Anna Troth, our archeologist, wasn't with us to see it, but we left it where we found it, as you are supposed to.

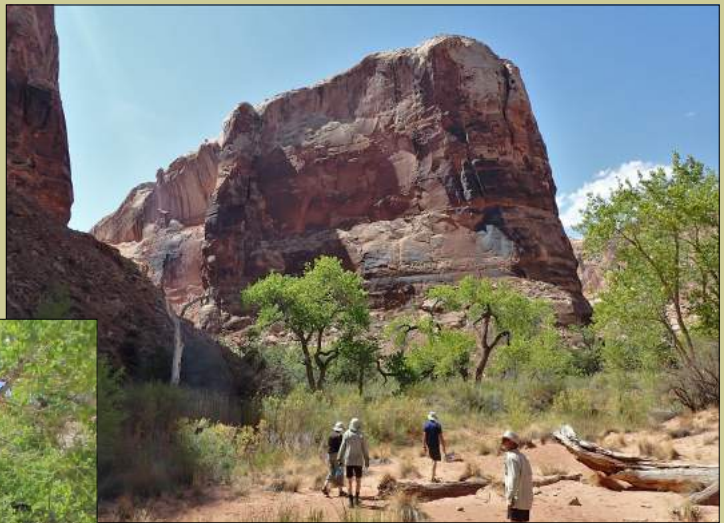
We also found, but did not leave behind, trash and lots of plastic Tiparillo stubs. We're proud that RMSKC paddlers always leave a campsite cleaner than we found it.



DAY II, SEPTEMBER 10: Early in the day we passed a distinctive formation that J. W. Powell named *Dellenbaugh's Butte*, in honor of the young artist on his 1871 trip. To Powell it looked like the bottles of ink the teenager carried for sketching the scenery. Other names used today are *The Anvil* and *The Inkwell*.



DAY II, SEPTEMBER 10, CONTINUED: We hiked in Three Canyon, just upstream from Trin-Alcove Bend but didn't look long enough to find the petroglyphs that the guidebook said were there.



A strangely misshapen cottonwood, perhaps caused by an early snow storm years ago?

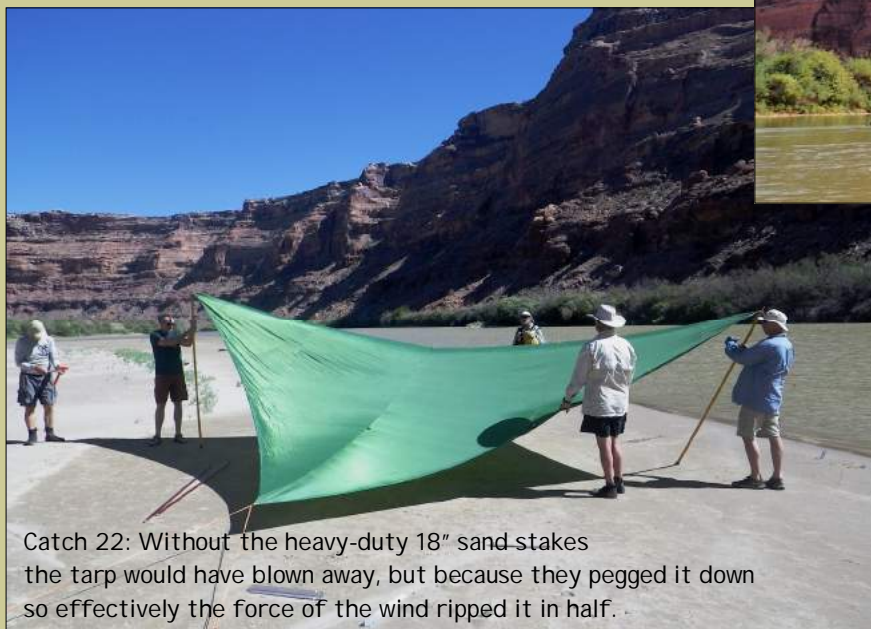
The night's camp, at about river mile 84, was on a large sandbar. It gave us lots of room but the winds that came up after dark were awful.

The howling, the flapping of rain flies and the sand blowing in kept people awake and on edge. It's a rare wind on the river which starts that late in the evening and lasts that long, but it made us all leery of staying on any more sandbars.

DAY III, SEPTEMBER 11: No more sandbars? Sorry, campsites are hard to find this time of year; most of the ones marked on the map were labeled "high water" and required hauling gear and boats up a steep bank through scrub and brush.



High cliffs on Day Three



Catch 22: Without the heavy-duty 18" sand stakes the tarp would have blown away, but because they pegged it down so effectively the force of the wind ripped it in half.

We stopped at river mile 73.5, a large island of sand opposite the *Launch Marguerite 1909* inscription: very cool, but no one took a photo of it.

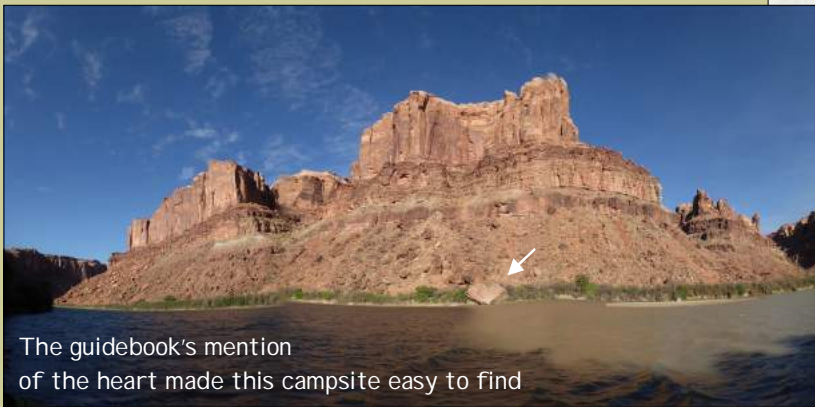
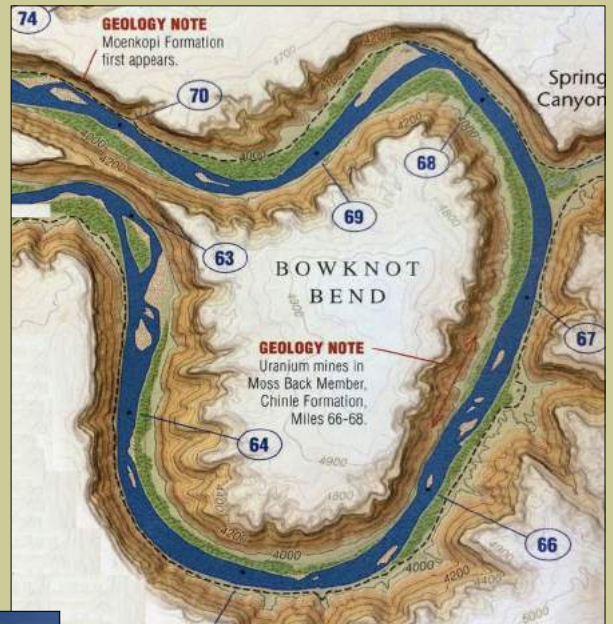
That sandbar had fierce afternoon gusts that shredded our large sun tarp almost as soon as it was up, but by evening they'd died down and we had a peaceful night.



Trip leader Tim Fletcher, who is always able to convince us to follow him on wonderful hikes

At the top we could see for miles to the west, both back upstream and downstream, to a sandbar with greenery at one end that looked especially pristine. The trail had been improved by unknown hard workers and was a relatively protected and easy climb.

DAY IV, SEPTEMBER 12: About midmorning we stopped at river mile 70. After some poking around we found the trail to the top of the saddle where the upstream and downstream portions of the river come closest to each other at Bowknot Bend.



The guidebook's mention of the heart made this campsite easy to find

After passing several nice campsites which were already taken, and some hard paddling against the wind, we camped at river mile 66.5, opposite a large heart-shaped rock.

There wasn't much room to unload the boats, and it had a steep climb up to the flat area, but we were tucked back in shady scrub oak trees without blowing sand to worry about.

A young man paddling some sort of blow-up craft joined the group for conversation and camped just a bit down from our tents.

He woke us up after dark with loud clapping to chase off a "snout-nosed" invader which had scared him. We all smelled skunk about that time and were more worried about him scaring that visitor!





DAY V, SEPTEMBER 13:

We spent another night at river mile 66.5 in the

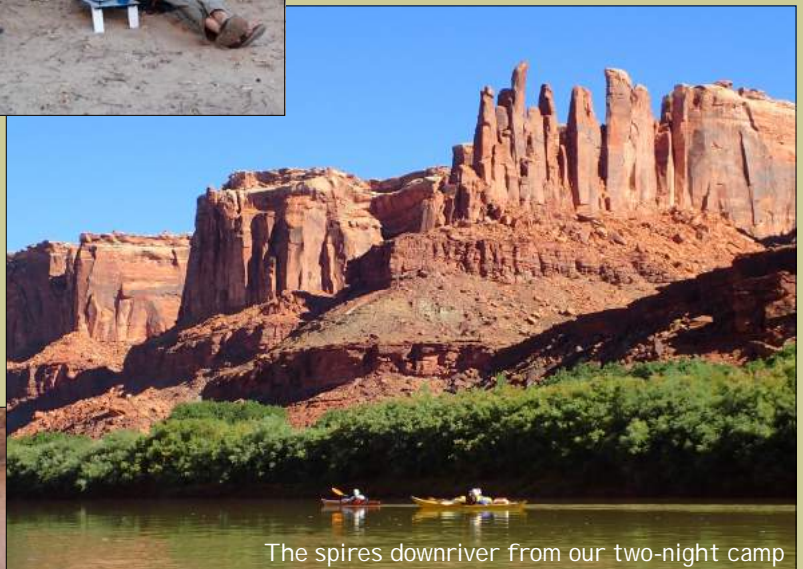
oak trees. During the day we hiked up to two abandoned uranium mines.

They were sealed shut but some of the miners' cabins and old machinery was still around. It looked like those fellows had cleared out in a hurry.



George, Dick, Sue, Ann Marie and Clark; we camped two nights here in the shade

DAY VI, SEPTEMBER 14: We stopped at the island we'd seen from the ridge [on the left of the photo on page 22]. Up close it was just an average sandbar but we did find a beaver slide and more evidence of beaver activity than we'd seen before.



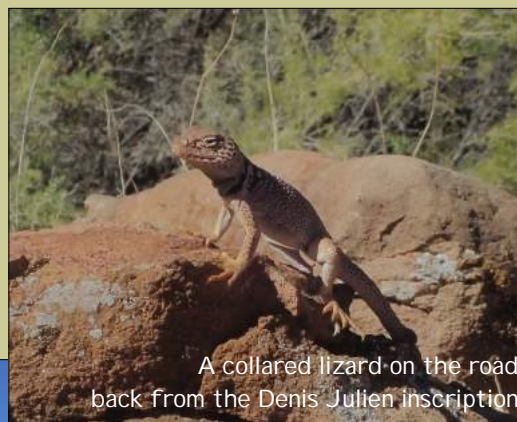
The spires downriver from our two-night camp



D. Julien
1836
3 mai

In the early afternoon we stopped again, at Hell Roaring Canyon (about river mile 55) to walk up a jeep road to find one of Denis Julien's signatures. We were amazed to learn that the dates on the trapper's different inscriptions along the river make historians think he was traveling upstream, in May, when the water runs its fastest!

DAY VI, SEPTEMBER 14, CONTINUED: We paddled 14 miles, a longer day than we'd realized. We found a sandbar within two miles of Mineral Bottom where we'd be taking out in the morning, and set up camp for the last night.



A collared lizard on the road back from the Denis Julien inscription



Unpacking on Day Six

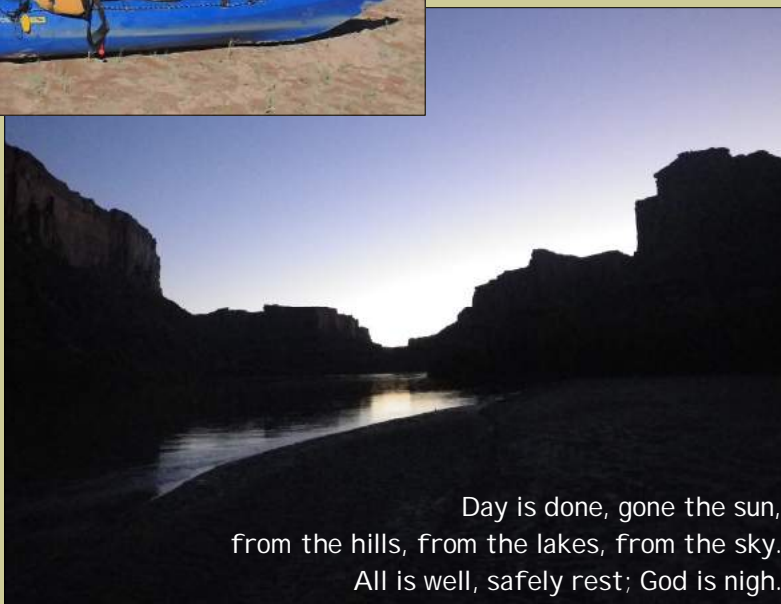
A tent went rolling end over end before the required sand stakes were pounded in, but the wind wasn't a problem for long.

Everyone swam and cleaned up, enjoying the sandy instead of muddy bottom we found on that stretch of river.

DAY VII, SEPTEMBER 15: We reached the take-out with plenty of time to clean our boats and organize our gear into duffels and IKEA bags for the shuttle back to Moab.

While we waited for the van we visited with the other groups coming off the water—there were several sets of younger guys on high school reunion adventures—and watched the people putting in.

We arrived at Milt's for burgers and malts, an end-of-trip tradition, and found we were in line behind an entire soccer team. But we got to our motel in Fruita with plenty of time to clean up for dinner and everyone made it safely back to the Denver area the next day. It was another wonderful trip in red rocks country.



Day is done, gone the sun,
from the hills, from the lakes, from the sky.
All is well, safely rest; God is nigh.

SAVE THE DATE! 2019 WINTER POTLUCK AND MEETING

- Saturday, January 26th from 2:00 to 5:00
- Fellowship Hall, Atonement Lutheran Church in Lakewood