

Five events from our Canyon trip Sept. 2013 – from Bob Schafer

1. Crystal Rapid – We scouted the rapid from the left and saw big waves, a drop off on the left and at least two holes in the middle and left parts of the channel. An island sat below the big waves and we had read about the boulder field below the rapid, Tim was first and made it through, and then Bill went. Right after the big waves and holes, he got caught up in the boulder field below. We came behind along the right side of the rapid and saw Bill stuck there. Allison and Bob caught the thrown rope and tried to hold on as we passed by. It became obvious that we could not pull them free and Allison went into the water, as our boat kept moving while she held onto the rope. We got her back into the boat as we moved through the remainder of the rapid and stopped at the first eddy that we could. We saw Tom coming behind us and watched as he became stranded on the island in the middle of the stream. George and Allison left Bob with the boat and walked along the shore to help pull out Bill from the shore since he was somewhat close to shore. Tom and his crew struggled for a good 20 min doing weight shift and jumping on the raft to loosen it from the grip of the rock field, which had caught them. Tim and Holly from the first boat walked over the cliffs on the shore to help pull Bill free. They were successful at pulling on the stuck boat from different angles, and soon Bill floated past. Tom was too far out in the stream to help, but they eventually freed themselves and floated by. Lesson - if the rope does not free the stranded boat, let go so that you are not pulled over board. Be careful about going over rocks, you may get stuck.
2. Upset rapid – We scouted the rapid on the right, big waves, a hole and a wall on the left. Tom went first. Made it. Bill went second and stopped just after the biggest part. We could see that Bill had stopped and was not moving. The sun was bright in our eyes and Bill was hung up in what looked like an overhang on the left side near the wall. He had not completed the rapid. We thought he was stuck on a rock or something, and we knew we could not help from the right side of the river. If we ran by, Bill would be stranded without the possibility of our help. We were concerned and devised a plan to rescue Bill's boat by having Sam throw a rope with a carabiner to them as he passed, or if the passage was close enough, Sam would jump into their boat and hook the carabiner to their D- ring before the rope played out so that the passing boat might give a jerk and pull out the stuck boat. Tim and Sam were ready, they ran the rapid on the more dangerous left side and we could barely see as the two boats pulled out of the area at the bottom of the rapid together. Rejoicing, we ran the rapid on the right as George thought that side to be a safer run. The waves nearly tipped us sideways, but we high sided and kept the bow from rising too high and flipping to the left. I pushed hard up and to the right, as we were drenched and rose to about 80 degrees on the left tube of the boat. After we passed through, we caught up to Bill and asked about how the rescue went. They said they were not trapped, but had stopped in an eddy to watch us pass by and were not in any danger. All that planning and anxiety for nothing. Lessons – Let the other know of your intentions, learn and use river signals. High siding a flipping boat can prevent flipping.
3. Lava Falls rapid – We scouted the rapid on the right. This is the biggest and highest rated rapid in the canyon. The drop at the falls was amazing. It went into a huge truck sized hole and generated a tall wave at the back-side. It was obvious that the pour-over and drop must be skirted. There was the left side,

which is the standard path at higher water levels, but at today's lower levels, the left side had many rocks showing, so the sensible route was to the right. That being decided, led to the next obstruction, another hole nearly as large as the first hole. An agile boater might be able to miss the second hole by pulling left and accepting the 8- 10 wave train that followed. The current seemed to be pushing to the right and we realized that an agile left might not be possible in our 1000 pound rafts. So if you went right around the second hole you might miss the wave train, but you would set yourself up for the cheese - grater rock, a large Buick - sized piece of limestone fluted and carved by the waves into a razor sharp raft ripper. We watched as a small 8 foot kayak slipped into the current. He missed the first drop, skirted the edge of the first hole, rising and falling with the waves. He pulled to the left and his small craft passed the second hole. Then the wave train launched him on a mad roller coaster ride, which flipped him on the second crest. He was upside down for another wave, and then righted himself with a smooth Eskimo roll. He finished the wave train and raised his arms and paddle above his head in signal that he had been successful in riding Lava falls. Two 18 foot rafts followed and made it, though the left skirt of the second hole was not possible. They plunged through the hole and came out the other side; success again. So the boatmen and women of our group walked slowly back to our rafts and began the mental work of remembering and analyzing what we had seen and formulated the route we would try to follow. Tim was first, he missed the first hole and skirted to the right. The second hole was approached head-on while he rowed violently to the left. He hit the hole, dropped, and rose to the crest of the boiling mess. His crew pushed hard, and the raft crept over the summit. The wave train swallowed him but he rode through and emerged wet but successful. Tim pulled into the eddy just below the cheese - grater and waited... We were next. George, a veteran of 10 previous rides over Lava Falls was our boatman. He had watched and studied and had a plan. We entered to the right of the tongue and skirted the first hole, not missed it, but rode the right hand extremity of the thing. From our perch above, the hole looked car-sized, but from our seat on the river, the hole was easily a 20 foot vacuum into the core of the river. Our passage over the right side got us through, but we were tipped 80 degrees to the left and showered with enough water to fill the boat in a second. The top 3 feet of the wave tumbled into our boat, and we were sitting waist deep in a moat. We emerged from the wave with only a few moments before the second hole loomed before us. George was fighting the oars and worked to pull left of the impending repetition of another cascade. We dropped into the left half of the hole. The back wave of the hole looked 10 feet high above and in front of us. Our weight accelerated us into the drop and we held on and arched our bodies over the bow as we rose out of the hole. Another drenching as the boat hesitated, and finally pushed over the hole's back wave. We had made it. We cheered as the wave train approached. The train was massive but not as deep or as wide as the holes. Then something appeared 10 feet in front of the boat, and I immediately thought some object had ripped loose traversing the holes. I stared and recognized a person's head, but was confused because I knew we were the only ones in the rapid at that moment. Then I saw it was George! Wait, George is supposed to be rowing... I turned around and the boatman's seat was empty! We were moving through the biggest wave train and no one was at the helm! I jumped back into the rowing position and grabbed for the oar..The cheese-grater rock was coming, we were in a wave roller coaster and

George needed to be rescued. The other oar was gone... It had been violently wrenched from George's hand and pulled loose by the passage through the hole. The oar's safety line held, and Allison pulled the dangling oar up from the side of the raft. We worked desperately to reinsert the oar into the oarlock. After regaining control, I pulled on the oars hard to avoid the rock coming at us. After seeing the rock pass harmlessly to our right I turned and rowed for George as he had drifted in front and to the right of the raft. I approached him and saw that I would hit and pass over him if I continued. He was swimming for the right shore, and Tim threw him a rope. By the time he caught the rope, I was there and Allison grabbed him and yanked him back into the boat. By then, the second Lava rapid was approaching and Holly was yelling about a yellow bag that had been torn loose when George went overboard. I looked for my yellow bag and it had been torn loose by the waves. That bag had my keys and wallet in it. We rowed through 2 more smaller rapids before it was recovered. By then, the rest of our group had passed through Lava Falls. We pulled into an eddy with a nice sandy beach and broke out the lunch as we got George on to shore and checked his bruises. He had been ejected by the wave smashing into the oar in his left hand and as he went out, the oar whacked him in the left calf. Lessons – Rescue involves first making sure the boat can function, second, pick up any people from the water, and third, collect any lost items that may have been washed overboard. Fourth, pack your most valuable item into something that floats and secure it tightly.

4. Killer Fang Falls – By now we had passed Lava falls and we were feeling pretty good. Able to handle anything; We had the rescue bit down and practiced, and we had only a few days left... We were canyon boatmen. Next came the rapid that had a history. Rapid 232 had claimed the lives of a newlywed couple in November 1928. Glenn and Bessie Hyde had been riding the pre-dam river on their honeymoon and went missing. The boat was found 7 miles downstream but they never found the bodies. We were ready to ride that rapid. There were only two or three rapids left before we got into the part of the river drowned by lake Mead. We approached the rapid and did not scout it though scouting would have been difficult because of the nearly vertical walls above the rapid. George said I should try this one and I agreed because there were only a few rapids left, and it was toward the later part of the day. I knew from reading the river guide that there were some hydraulics (meaning holes and a wave train) in the center of the flow and that the current tended to pull you to the right. On the left was a steep pour over and a wall undercut by the current. So, I figured keep to the right side of the wave train and ride the right edge of the hole. The guide also spoke of the “killer fangs” at the bottom on the right side. We giggled at the name and no one had heard of the term before, just the history of the drowned newlyweds. The fangs were 2-3 feet projections of the hard schist rock that we had been passing through for the last week or 10 days. It was a hard sharp rock that made up the granite gorge portion of the canyon's interior. There were two of the fangs at the bottom right side of the rapid sitting there after passing through the major hydraulics of the rapid. First Tom went. He took the good line to the right and passed through without much more than a little water in his boat. Then Sam went in paddling an inflatable kayak that we had brought along and used throughout the trip. Sam hit the first hole and was dumped out. Though he was swimming, Sam had been through many rapids in the kayak and had done

most successfully and had swum a few times. We watched as Sam crawled up onto the kayak after his spill, and we mostly thought he was all right. Next down was Tim with Holly in one of the 18-foot rafts. Tim was a little preoccupied with Sam's swim and so entered the rapid and dropped immediately into the first major hole. The raft dropped as the bow entered and violently popped the bow up on the backside of the hole. Holly was launched into the water. Tim now had no one to high side and the raft trembled in the backwash and flipped over, throwing Tim out the right side. This all happened right in front of us as we were the next raft to enter. I slid through the right side of the hole and my crew did a great high side balancing the left tipping raft. The wave train whipped us back and forth, right side up, then left side up, trying to eat my oars on each roller coaster bounce. My left oar vanished from my hand on the third bounce, as I pushed on the remaining right oar to avoid the killer fangs that were dripping with the saliva that was about to consume our raft. The oar had come out of the oarlock again, tearing loose from the Allen screw that had held it for 232 miles so far. I slammed it back in and pulled away from the fangs at the last moment. We cleared them by about two feet. Then we saw Holly swimming toward us, a little wild-eyed, but doing a good stroke through the wave train to our boat. With Holly on board, we then focused on getting Tim's flipped raft into an eddy so we could right it. The task was done in an orderly fashion as we replaced his torn loose oar and used 6 people to climb onto the overturned raft and pull it back over. Tim lost no items except the oar and we quickly found a campsite to dry out the clothes and food that had been dampened by the flip. Lesson – Focus on the rapid, rescue second, then use ropes to right the flipped 1000 pound, 18 foot raft.