

Gore Range Natural Science School

San Juan River Archeology & Natural History Invitational
Tuesday, April 14 – Sunday, April 19, 2009



Rich with scenery and history, southeastern Utah can take your breath away. Blend river rafting through deep, Precambrian canyons with hiking up hidden washes perimetered with ancient ruins, add fine food, talented guides, engaging scholars and sleeping under a canopy of stars, and this Invitational is the perfect adventure in a fascinating, remote region so close to home.

Join Gore Range Natural Science School off the beaten track and discover the unexpected on this five night, five day rafting and hiking Invitational. Our guides and a resident scholar interpret ancient Anasazi rock art, uncover hidden cliff dwellings and identify geological formations as we travel down 26 miles of the San Juan River from Bluff to Mexican Hat. We will meander on comfortable rafts through a quarter of a billion years' worth of colorful rock formations, making camps in spectacular corners of the canyon. Daily hikes up washes, most, only approachable from the river, will lead to spectacular Anasazi rock art and cliff dwellings. Our guides will prepare and serve our meals and help with setting up our tents. Evening discussions by crackling campfires will enhance our understanding of the natural and cultural history of this mesmerizing place.

Day 1 Tuesday, April 14

Arrive in Bluff, Utah on your own. Bluff, population 250, is about a 5 hour drive from the Vail Valley and is nestled between 300 foot red sandstone cliffs along the San Juan River. It was settled in 1880 by Mormons and was home to prehistoric people, the Anasazi, 1,200 years ago.

Check into the Recapture Lodge. The Lodge features an inviting common room with a grand piano, clean rooms, a heated swimming pool, spa and picnic grounds. It is adjacent to Wild Rivers Expeditions, our outfitter.

5:30 PM – Enjoy a casual picnic dinner and an overview of the geology and cultural history of this region by noted author and guide Vaughn Hadenfeldt. He is the owner and guide of award winning [Far Out Expeditions](#) and has spent over 20 years exploring and guiding in the Four Corners.

7 PM – Stroll over to the Wild Rivers Expeditions hogan for prelaunch orientation and distribution of waterproof bags and boxes. Drinks and conversation around the piano at the Recapture Lodge will follow.

Day 2 Wednesday, April 15

After breakfast at the Recapture Lodge, we leave in Wild Rivers vans for the Sand Island launch ramp four miles west of town. The float begins as the river meanders past orange and black streaked sandstone outcroppings.

Soon the boats pull into shore and we take a short walk to a site once inhabited by ancient desert farmers, the Anasazi. Large oval steps are carved into the cliff wall and petroglyphs appear around every corner. Down river a short distance, lunch is served under the cottonwood trees at the famous Butler Wash petroglyph panel with plenty of time to examine this extensive group of mysterious images.

Camp is pitched in the late afternoon on a sandy beach among the cottonwoods and giant sagebrush. Our guides prepare dinner, complete with appetizers and dessert. Sunset, crackling campfire and discussions with our resident scholar wrap up the evening before we retreat to our tents or choose to sleep under the stars.

Day 3 Thursday, April 16

First light finds the guides in the kitchen brewing coffee and creating a bountiful breakfast.

We float further downstream and then follow our guides for a walk to River House, an 800-year-old cliff dwelling. We will spend time amid the round walls of a kiva where dried corn cobs remain with bits of pottery. An additional hike brings us to more Anasazi sites and another large kiva.

We'll then go a short distance downstream to investigate a great kiva and associated surface sites, and then a hike up San Juan Hill. This steep route was chiseled along a diagonal opening in the cliff by the famous Mormon "Hole-In-The-Rock" expedition in 1880. The views from its top and also the top of Comb Ridge are breathtaking.



Day 4 Friday, April 17

After breakfast we pack the boats for a short float downstream to Chinle Wash, where painted rock art and cliff dwellings hide among the rock alcoves. Author Tony Hillerman calls Chinle Wash "Many Ruins Canyon" in the mystery novel *Thief of Time*.

At Mile 9 the river enters the "anticline" and the canyon walls rise up dramatically. The river narrows and the pace quickens. This might be a particularly good section of river to test out our inflatable kayaks!

Camp is made deep within the canyon where the limestone walls are full of fossils and the river current murmurs against the rocks. More discussions with our knowledgeable guides and resident scholar will help answer questions and help paint a better picture of both the classic Precambrian geology of the region and the Anasazi who called this river and deep canyon their home.

Day 5 Saturday April 18

There is time after breakfast for fossil hunting. An undulating pattern to the rocks reveals the presence of "bioherms." Porous mounds in an ancient shallow sea, they act as a reservoir rock to capture oil.

The trip continues with more floating and enticing rapids. You can stay in the rafts or enjoy playing the rapids in our kayaks. Desert bighorn sheep may appear along this stretch. Rocks tilt and canyon walls diminish as Mexican Hat Rock, a large red slab balanced on a small pedestal, comes into view. The vivid reds and grays of the geologically fascinating "anticline" zig-zag across the eastern horizon, appearing like a Navajo blanket of stone.

The journey ends by 2 or 3 in the afternoon at the boat launch in the town of Mexican Hat, where Wild River's vans transport us back to Bluff.

3:30 - 4 PM – Expected arrival in Bluff and transport back to our lodging.

6 PM – Cocktails in the Lodge or picnic area outside.

7 PM – Dinner at Cow Canyon Restaurant, a Bluff landmark, where a guest speaker will help us synthesize the natural and cultural history of this exceptional and unique corner of the world.

Day 6 Sunday April 19

Breakfast and departures.

Cost: \$1,100/per person of which \$250 is a tax deductible contribution to the Science School.

Includes five nights lodging: two nights in hotels and three nights camping on the river, four days guided rafting with kayaking option, five dinners, five breakfasts, four lunches, all guides, guest speakers, Science School staff coordination, most cocktails.

Not included: rental of tents, sleeping bags and pads (if you do not bring your own), personal gear, transportation to and from Bluff, Utah, any gratuities for Wild Rivers expeditions guides, alcoholic beverages at dinner on Saturday night.

Please contact Natalia Hanks at 970.827.9725 ext 30 or nataliah@gorerange.org with questions and to make your reservation.

