



# THE **Waiting List**

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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

# Check-out Time

Finally, it's here, it being, presumably, the end of my term as GCPBA President. But 'it' could also refer to the resolution of this lawsuit, which, fortuitously, is arriving at about the same time. In that case, in the big picture, there's little distinction between the two. When I assumed the Presidency of our organization, my intention was to extend the natural resources work we had begun (one of Tom Martin's initiatives), solidifying the rivers cleanup and maintenance efforts with research and other stewardship activities. I had also hoped to help tone the rhetoric of GC River discussions to one of less antagonism and broader involvement. Alas, these priorities were demoted when a higher priority was thrust upon GCPBA with the Park's cessation of the public planning process, a scant two months after my term began.

In retrospect, this was an inevitable step in the evolution of our organization, i.e. taking to the courts to right a wrong. Don't get me wrong, I most definitely would prefer not to litigate. It should be the last step. However, when this is the only option remaining, it must be employed. And until one uses this tool, and uses it effectively (i.e. winningly), the managing agencies will, when pressured, disregard their mandates and your input, and revert to the politically expedient. The unfolding of events over the last two years, both litigious and political, have proven to the Park, the NPS, the DOI, and the concessions lobby, that the self-guided, self-outfitted public is a constituency that must be included in resource and recreation planning, and we will marshal the necessary resources to make this so.

Related to the litigation efforts, I want to mention and profusely thank some who were instrumental in making this a successful effort. We were very well served by Byron Hayes in direct management of GCPBA's efforts; we were very well advised and informed by Jason Robertson and Kim Crumbo; we were very well represented by John Bachrach and Marty Wilson. All of these are and have been GCPBA Board members. We are also very fortunate to have had as stalwart allies in this effort American Whitewater, the National Canoe Association, and the National Parks Conservation Association. This is a team that will remain coordinated in the upcoming CRMP process.

In spite of the all-consuming nature of the litigation effort with respect to my time, I have been very gratified at the extensive efforts initiated and led by GCPBA Board members and

general members. We have continued to be proactive in resource management trips, including cleanups on the San Juan and upper Colorado Rivers (thanks to Tom, Jo, Warren, Bob and more); we have successfully completed our first research trip through the Canyon (thanks to the Richards M and Q, Elson, and more); we've been successful in the absolutely necessary fund-raising, with the auction (thank You! Jo and sponsors), the annual drive (thank you everybody!), grants, and special supporters (thank you thank you thank you Jay Kenney and the Kenney Foundation). Though our official interactions with the Park were necessarily frozen due to the lawsuit, our Board members have promulgated many efforts that have enhanced the effectiveness, status, and future of our organization. I have continued to be impressed, motivated, and re-energized by the commitment, diligence, and persistence of the GCPBA Board and the GCPBA membership.

With that as segue, I want to use this last letter to make my most important pitch, request, exhortation to all of our members. We will soon be restarting the Colorado River Management Plan public process. We will have a chance to influence the scope of that Plan, which will likely serve as a blueprint for future plans, and we will have a chance to demonstrate the advocacy for a preferred plan. GCPBA will be putting forth in the next few months a 'preferred alternative' that will address the long-standing access inequities, resource protection, and other critical plan elements. It is absolutely essential for all of GCPBA's members to inform themselves of the CRMP

AMMO CAN DOC

# Casinos of Stone: Monsoon Gambling and Playing the Slot Canyons

*"In a flash he was gone...  
It happened so soon.  
What could we really do?"*

*Black Velvet by Alannah Myles*

It's pure serendipity, and it's pure joy— those trysts of chance, when you unexpectedly run into a friend in a place you share a passion for. A timeless moment of connection, although often fleeting, can be so genuine and so sincere, that it remains with you always, long after each has traveled onto entirely different journeys. For lovers of canyons and rivers, when the rendezvous is deep within a sculpted gorge beside flowing water, there is nothing quite like it.

Approaching the mouth of the Little Colorado River and the Colorado, I was hoping there was a chance for just such an encounter. It was mid-June and very hot for foot travel with a heavy pack, but I knew it was his favorite place on Earth, and a place he loved to frequent. I was boating but he'd be hiking. And although somewhat of an eccentric and a loner, to me, George was the epitome of Grand Canyon passion.

Pulling in, we walked up the bank along side the steadily flowing blue-green water, and amongst a steadily flowing stream of tourists from the boats. It was a busy day. Lots of people. If he was there, I thought it was unlikely that I would be able to spot him amidst those frolicking in the water or sunning on the ledges. Then, looking across, one person did stand out. Short and lean, and walking quickly with a recognizable sense of urgency, and a seasoned hiker's confidence, I knew it was George.

Calling him over, he introduced me to his new hiking companion, Linda, a soft-spoken gal, in her late forties. It was her first Canyon hike. George, on the other hand was a bonafide expert hiker and professional Canyon photographer. I know he had done at least 6000 miles on foot in roughly 25 years. It truly was his home away from home, and the source of his livelihood.

He was his usual nervous bundle of energy, and did most of the talking. We had a great conversation, and talked about a possible future hike. Like always, his enthusiasm seemed to rival the setting, his passion as deep as the Canyon itself. As we departed, I sensed he was feeling a twinge of loneliness at being left behind. Having been in his boots many times before, I knew exactly how he felt. I smiled softly, left them some cold beer and soda, and waved goodbye.

It's really more a question of when, not if. Near-misses

are already numerous, and hundreds of river runners, many unknowingly, continue to put themselves at risk every single day during the monsoon season, usually for reasons that are almost justifiable. The Grand Canyon is famous for its scenic side canyon attractions, many of which are spectacular narrow slots, found in few places except the Canyon and the American Southwest. A river trip through the Grand isn't complete without stops to these locations, and rather, it is sacrilegious not to stop. They become trip-long expectations and "must-sees." Often the intense pressure, despite warning signs of potential flooding, from fellow trip members and for commercial guides, the high-paying and demanding clients, supercedes good judgment by those who should know better. The "we may never get this chance again," mentality spurs a gambler's dilemma: should we stay or should we go? In the gambler vein then, knowing the odds and the sheer numbers, it thus seems inevitable that one day an entire river party will be swept into oblivion...unless we better learn how to play those odds.

In many ways flash floods are the Southwest's rival to the Midwest's tornadoes. The product of natural meteorological phenomena, fast and furious, they have incredible destructive potential. Both are a fascinating spectacle of sound, wind, water, and power. To see one, just once, is not uncommon in either region. However, getting caught in one, and living to tell about it, is. Unlike tornadoes, for most Americans the destructive potential of flash floods remains vague. Most occur in unpopulated, remote washes and drainages where there are no buildings to level, or inhabitants to wash away. The reality is,

even for most lifelong residents of the American Southwest, where their destructive evidence is all around, flash floods will never be seen and never fully appreciated. Again, the problem is partly because of the fact it's harder to relate to a deeply carved arroyo, or boulder-choked drainage than a freshly demolished house or twisted auto wreckage. Consequently, they are often underestimated and unanticipated by those of us who ultimately venture into their domain at the wrong time, even if that adventurer is a seasoned, experienced canyon hiker.

"Have you heard the news about Mancuso yet? You know he's missing..."

Up until that point my phone conversation with ranger Bil Vandergraff about an upcoming National Park Service trip down the Grand had been lighthearted.. "So what else is knew?" was my reply. I had known George for years. I also knew he was notorious for showing up late after a long back-country excursion in the Canyon. "How long has he been missing?" I asked.

"Ten days. And he was reported missing along with the gal he was hiking with by her son. A woman named Linda..."

My heart went to my throat. I swallowed hard. "Dammit George," I thought aloud.

"The monsoons" are typically a welcome and expected reprieve from the intense summer heat in the Southwest. The gradual buildup of moisture-laden clouds from wind-driven air masses migrating up from the south, followed by afternoon thunder-showers is almost always refreshing. Plus, we always need the water. Unfortunately, most of that water leaves as quickly as it came. Sometimes quicker. This seems especially true in the higher desert elevations of the Colorado Plateau. The rain water collects on the relatively rocky, barren terrain, and with nothing to hold it back, it begins a frenzied race with itself toward the nadir in elevation. Gathering mass, momentum, and debris, it begins careening like a freight train out of control down dry streambeds and washes, engulfing and blasting out anything in its way. By the time it gets to the bottom of the drainage it can be a debris-choked tidal wave of mud, rock, cacti, cow manure, basketballs, and tires. All this can occur from a single storm cell over a very small area, where just a few miles away things remain blue-skied, and bone-dry. Therein lies the biggest problem inherent to river running in the Canyon and side canyon exploration during stormy weather.

On the plateaus, one can see monsoon activity for



photo: Bruce McElya

miles. From the narrower confines deep within the Canyon a little slit of sky is all you get. The deeper you go, the more constricted it gets. Now, if ominous, black thunderheads litter the sky, and in unbridled advertising, are plainly announcing that a downpour is imminent, or bolder yet, it is already raining, the decision about what to do should be obvious. Fold. Stay out. Mother Nature just showed you her hand, and she's about to play a RoyalFlush, literally. Unless, of course, she changes her mind....Now, suppose she's wearing her poker face and that slice of sky is invitingly blue or the clouds are fluffy-white? One can easily be lulled into a false sense of security (i.e. she's bluffing), and oblivious to a possible torrent heading their way from a recent thundershower that had been parked head of the drainage. Unfortunately, the monsoon season, which is July through September, is the prime catalyst for a peak time in random flash flooding, and it also coincidentally coincides with the prime time

(continued from preceding page) with a peak time for river travelers in Grand Canyon.

Whether or not one appreciates this monsoon pattern, you're in the game, and it then becomes a gamble.

What's the solution? To simply say stay out of Deer Creek, Matkatamiba, Havasu or any other slot canyon at all times during the monsoon season seems to be extreme and unnecessary advice, even for the Park Service. After all, river runners have been doing it for years. In fact, flash-flood-related deaths in the Canyon, have yet to involve a river runner, which is amazing. So what is reasonable advice? Is there any other useful information that may help in making that tough decision less tough, and make the "monsoon gamble" a little more calculated rather than a reflex throw of the dice?

Data are limited, but from 11 flash floods recorded in the last 12 years between July and September at the Phantom Ranger Station by volunteer ranger Sorjs Hortsman, all but 2 occurred during afternoon or early evening hours. This is over 80%. Of recent times, we also know historically some of the biggest monsoon floods have been witnessed afternoon or evening events, nearly catching whole groups of river runners (like at Diamond Creek in '84 or Havasu in '97). We also know that 9 of 11 fatality victims of flash floods in Grand Canyon (and like the other 2), as well as 11 victims in nearby Antelope Canyon in '97, died during afternoon monsoonal flash floods. This happens basically for two reasons: First, "typical" monsoons by definition and atmospheric physiology are afternoon events. Second, it usually takes a significant flash flood from 1 to 4 hours to reach the river level because they come from well up the drainage (ones closer to the river tend to be much smaller).

Although probably not statistically significant do to the small sample size, there definitely appears to be a trend. The take home message is this: while entering any slot or narrow Canyon which is part of a large drainage area during the typical monsoon season is potentially risky at any given time during a 24-hour period, venturing in during the afternoon or evening hours (i.e., 12-8 pm.) is probably substantially riskier.

Afternoon thunderstorms had intermittently been showering the area for days. George and Linda had probably seen at least two flash floods come through the Little Colorado drainage, surging below their campsite at the confluence of Salt Trail Canyon and the LCR. The campsite, which they had safely and purposefully placed on higher ground, was found abandoned, but personal items and sleeping gear remained, as though they planned on returning any minute.

On August 7, Linda noted in her journal that today they would go the "Emerald Pool," up Big Canyon, a tributary of the LCR. She was hoping to possibly wash her hair in clean water. It was her final journal entry.

Perhaps given this pattern, one could argue that if it's

absolutely necessary to explore that side canyon, if it's clear despite monsoon potential, one should consider doing it preferably in the morning hours, then get the hell out. If there is any hint of rain activity, forget it. Again, it sounds simple, but it's usually not that easy. Remember, the pressure may be on, and the timing for arrival may be off. Still, appreciating this phenomenon could help make a life-saving decision. Understand this holds true only for "typical" monsoon activity. If there is any unusualness to the pattern, all bets are off.

One must also understand flash floods can happen all year round. In fact, the largest, rapid-making flash floods with huge debris flows tend to be nighttime, late-winter or early spring events, where rain causes gradual snow pack melting. These floods, as well as those of other non-monsoon season low pressure storm systems, do not fall in the same category. It all comes down to a best-guess.

So what if you guess wrong?

Fortunately, one is not necessarily doomed if an unexpected flash flood is about to hit and you're stuck in the drainage. You still may have an ace in the hole. The fact is that most flashfloods are "telegraphed" to a degree and perceptible if one keeps their senses on alert. For example, with large floods (the potentially lethal kind), a deep roar typically precedes the flow by as much as a minute, sometimes even more. Like a train, it warns people to get out of the way, or else. Unfortunately, as loud as this roar may be, it's known to be potentially masked or at least muffled by creek babble, until the flood's on top of you. So think about keeping someone posted as a lookout just upstream up and away from the din of the creek or waterfall, but within earshot and eyesight of those in the creek. Or consider just staying up and out of water altogether. Look for potential escape routes as you head up. Most floods can be escaped by side scrambling (provided the walls aren't too steep), and sometimes a couple of seconds are all that're needed. And what many people don't know is that most flash floods could be outrun—in an open field sprint—by a healthy adult. The rub enters in when drainage requires tedious or tricky down climbing, or boulder hopping. Think about that when you're about to enter an especially steep, long and narrow, boulder-choked drainage (ponder how those boulders got there to begin with). Seriously consider not going beyond anything that you couldn't run through, or climb out of in a hurry, or stay in the wide-open section. Above all, stay vigilant for other subtle little clues, such as a sudden muddying of the creek (some floods present this way rather than a large, tumbling wave), the muddy smell of clay and other minerals in the air, and a sudden shift of wind or sound in the air.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that none of this is meant to dissuade or discourage off-river hiking. In fact, exploring the side canyons is truly rewarding and the best way to really "experience" Grand Canyon. They should be part of every Grand Canyon river trip. But take

time to heed the mood of Mother Nature before you ante in, and look for the appropriate signs for her permission to rummage through her house. Beyond this, always contemplate and respect the natural forces that formed the Canyon to begin with. Save your real gambling for the slot machines, preferably the nickel ones; you have a lot less to lose.

Searcher Scott Thybony found Linda's body tightly wrapped around the base of a tamarisk tree on August 22, four days after the search began. She was found below "Emerald Pool" about a mile up Big Canyon, several miles from their campsite. Still wearing her boots, most of her clothing and hair were gone, having been battered by rock and debris from a flash flood.

A Teva shirt was also found. It was snagged in the branches of a tamarisk about eight feet above the streambed, and film from the campsite later developed showed George Mancuso wearing the shirt.

A few days later, former dory boatman and archeologist Greg Woodall, now part of the NPS trail crew, found George's body on a routine river patrol trip. Coming to the Confluence with all participants aware of the search, Greg was tipped off by some ravens hovering over a rocky bar off the main island near the mouth. He was found about 5 feet off the river level and covered with driftwood debris. Ironically, this was George's most beloved and photographed spot in the Canyon.

"The ravens," Woodall said, "showed him to us. And he's where he wanted to be, and the ravens kind of guaranteed he'd be there forever."

*"You've got to know when to hold 'em.  
Know when to fold 'em.  
Know when to walk away.  
Know when to run.  
You never count your money  
sittin' at the table.  
There'll be time enough for countin'  
when the dealin's done."*

*The Gambler, by Kenny Rogers*

Rest easy my friend, we'll see you downstream.

Dr. Tom Myers

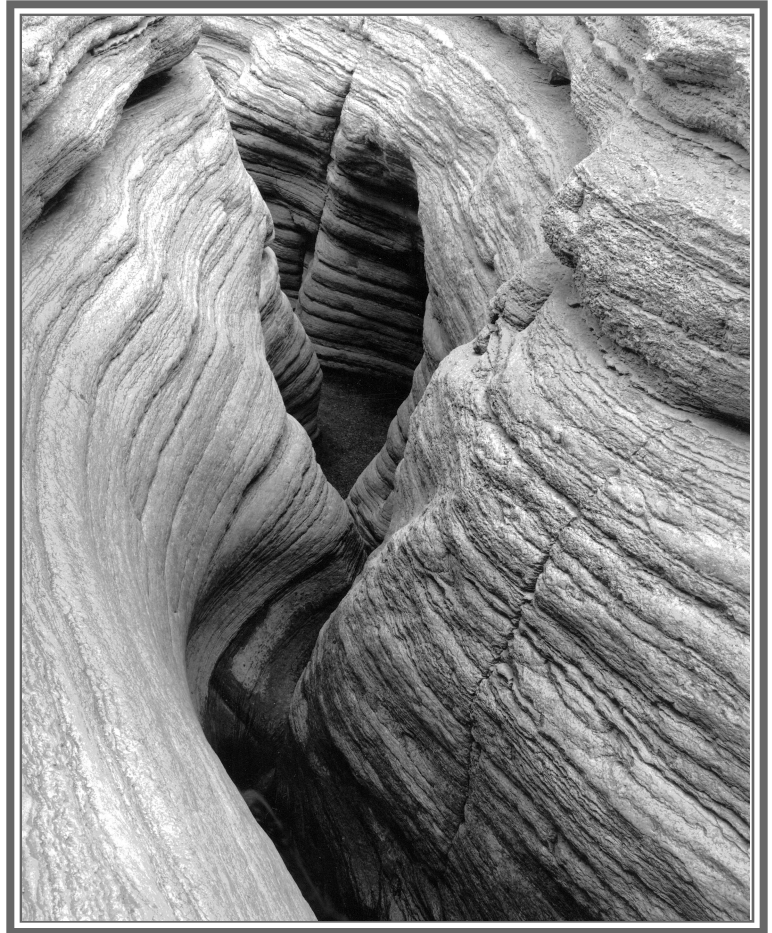


photo by Bruce McElya

## gcpba NEWSWIRE - BRIGHT ANGEL TRAIL WASHES OUT

On August 13, 2001 the Flagstaff Weather Service reported 2.69 inches of rain fell between 5:00 p.m. Sunday and 5:00 a.m. Monday morning - with the heaviest rain reported at approximately 2:12 a.m. The monsoon season, which generally extends from mid-July through mid-September, can produce intense rain showers and thunderstorms that can come without warning.

The Bright Angel Trail was closed due to damage caused by the heavy rain early that morning. The trail is closed from the Bright Angel Trailhead down to Indian Garden, a distance of approximately 4.6 miles. In addition, the pipeline that carries water from the South Rim to the resthouses, at Mile-and-a-half and 3 Mile, suffered a break near the resthouse at Mile-and-a-half. The last time the Bright Angel Trail closed due to damage from flooding was on July 14, 1999.

No injuries were reported.