

Westwater Canyon

A Slice of the Mighty Colorado by Tom Kleinschnitz Nestled deep in the sandstone cliffs between Grand Junction and Moab, Westwater Canyon provides a marvelous introduction to whitewater rafting and is ideal for adventurers who have only a few days in which to experience a river excursion. As the Colorado River descends into Westwater, the canyon walls begin to close in while rising overhead to 1200 feet. Due to the narrowness of this rock-strewn channel, with its fast water and high canyon walls, the rapids are a challenge anytime during the season. And that challenge builds excitement as the raft trip progresses down through the canyon. Marble Canyon Rapid, the first in the inner gorge, sets the stage for action. The waves rock the rafts from side to side, sloshing over the sides of the craft. As Marble Canyon ends, here comes Staircase Rapids, a series of deep trough waves that will leave the river enthusiast an adrenaline pumped grin. A short distance downriver is the entrance to Big Hummer Rapid, one that delivers a wild splash and a huge hole that boatmen must maneuver through or around. Around is often the prudent line. Of all the reasons to make it through Big Hummer Rapid boat bottom down, the most important is to be ready and braced for Funnel Falls, a truly breathtaking drop that offers the best of rushes every river runner seeks. Incredibly, the pace of the river runs even faster now, as the next two stretches of whitewater, Surprise and No Name go flashing by. Now, it's time to regroup and prepare for the one everybody talks about … Skull! Skull Rapid is formed as the river makes a tight, hard turn to river left. The rapid has a narrow entrance or approach with large and powerful hydraulics that try to funnel everything, including your raft, kayak or inflatable, over the top of Skull rock and down into the monstrous hole at the bottom. Getting channeled into the hole is problem one. Trying to climb out is yet another! Dead ahead of Skull is The Rock of Shock, a solid wall flanked on the right by a powerful back eddy that flushes everything into The Room of Doom, a large cavern scoured out of the rock wall. Exciting? Way, way cool. A successful run through Skull Rapid takes some precise maneuvering and leaves even seasoned veteran river runners exhilarated! Westwater still offers three more major rapids before exiting the canyon — Cross Bones, Sock-it-to-Me and Last Chance. In certain water levels, these final three offer fantastic runs that rival the journey through Skull. Got just a few days and want a great whitewater run? Try Westwater Canyon on the Colorado.