

## Green River: Desolation and Gray Canyons

Something ideal for everyone! By Bill and Jaci Dvorak If you were given the assignment of designing and engineering a perfect wilderness river trip that would be ideal for learning to be a whitewater boater plus offering an incredible river adventure, I would say, "why bother"? There is such a place that already exists! The Green River through Desolation & Gray Canyons is this ideal location. This 86-miles of the Green includes two of the most remote and isolated wilderness river canyons in the lower 48 states. The ribbon of water begins tranquilly in the Utah desert and gradually courses deeper and deeper into red sandstone canyons. In fact, at one point near crystal-clear Rock Creek, Deso (as river guides call it) is as deep as the Grand Canyon at Bright Angel Trail. Over one mile! And those first 26 miles of relatively calm water is hardly a precursor of what's to come. The remaining 60 miles gives way to over 62 rapids of rollicking, adrenalin pumping whitewater! These rapids start out class I-II rated and build to solid class III's as you move downstream. Not only does this allow novice boaters to become comfortable with their new craft from the start of the trip, it also offers the perfect progression of challenge for the beginning boater. No matter what type of watercraft, be it hard shell kayak, inflatable kayak, raft, sport-yak or canoe, the evolution of skill development is ideal. In addition, during summer months the water temperature of the river is quite warm, and when coupled with hot summer days makes getting wet a simple pleasure! When you combine this ideal boating progression with those majestic canyon walls, and put it all in a remote wilderness canyon setting, it seems you've got it all. Right? Wrong! The payback of this river trip doesn't stop there. A Deso adventure also offers incredible side canyon hikes where you may visit old moon-shiners' cabins, see walls of Fremont and Anasazi pictographs and petroglyphs, swim in crystal-clear spring fed side streams and explore Utah pioneer homesteads. See the hideouts and hear the tales about where Butch Cassidy and the Sundance kid once holed up. In fact, some of the "Wild Bunch" actually met their untimely ends in these secluded canyons. Due to the canyons' remoteness and inaccessibility, most river runners are flown in small aircraft from Salt Lake City or Grand Junction, Colorado to a landing strip high atop a mesa above the put-in point. This flight, taken early in the morning of the first day, offers spectacular views of the canyons and surrounding landscape that should not be missed! From the plane you can follow the twists and turns of the Green River and spot some of the beautiful sites you'll be seeing up close over the next several days. Most trips through Desolation and Gray Canyons are 5-8 day duration. Once on the river you will find that its warm water, expansive sand beaches and shady cottonwood groves also make this river a fantastic wilderness camping experience. Many a new camper has found that tents in the desert are not always necessary and, in fact, end up sleeping out under the stars on the beach. The totality of the experience is brought home by marveling at the celestial brilliance of the constellations, framed by the canyon walls that have guided adventurers for centuries. A variety of unique river trips have been inspired by historical explorations of the area and those in turn have spawned a specialty trip for almost everyone. These include recreations of John Wesley Powell's first exploration of the Green, corporate team building, teenage skills camps, women's and single's trips, Yoga classes on the beach featuring vegetarian cuisine, and even Chukar (a small upland game bird) hunting in the fall. One of the most spectacular specialty trips involves bringing music to the river and its canyons. Some outfitters have been featuring "Classical Music Journeys" and other music oriented trips for years in these canyons. The natural amphitheaters, large sandy beaches, grassy meadows and shady cottonwood groves provide a natural concert hall and offer exceptional acoustics for musical performances provided by various philharmonic and orchestral musicians. This is a once in a lifetime experience for many adventurers and one that music aficionados should not miss! It is often such a powerful and moving experience that many river runners and musicians return year after year to find inspiration, rejuvenate themselves, and rekindle their creative fires. Speaking of rejuvenation, the Green River is also an exceptional trip for inter-generational family outings. Many grandparents, parents and kids as young as five will enjoy the experiences available on this section of the river. Daily enjoyment for old and young alike may be cruising down-river in an oar boat conversing with a guide full of stories about the river; (and usually some tall tales about their own experiences!). Or possibly mom, dad and the older kids can navigate the river in one or two man inflatable kayaks. Adults and teenagers alike can take on a new challenge of learning how to run the river in a hard shell kayak. Everyone can experience the river at the same time, yet all will have an individual story to tell at the end of the day. Each will have done something unique. Family bonding on these trips is a delight to behold. In fact, all the trips, including those that are more specialized, have their own magic. It's something that cannot be explained. It must be experienced. Those that have will understand that there truly is River Magic and no two trips are ever the same. The Green River through Desolation and Gray Canyons is truly one of the Southwest's lesser-known exceptional river trips. It's affordability (some outfitters have lower family rates or have "Kids Go Free" dates), and accessibility from major airports in Grand Junction or Salt Lake City make it one of the best adventure vacation venues available for any type of group or individual. In so many ways, it well deserves the title of an ideal river experience. Bill Dvorak, with wife Jaci, own and operate Bill Dvorak Kayak and River Expeditions out of Lathrop, Colorado. After a gazillion runs down the Green River through Desolation Canyon, they ought to know a bit about it by now!