

Glorious Gates

Lodore Canyon By Wendy Hatch May Lodore Canyon, located in the sprawling acreage of Dinosaur National Monument, offers many miles of scenic wonderment. Major John Wesley Powell explored the Green River, once called seeds-ke-dee by early Native Americans, in 1869. When his group of hardy explorers reached the area now called Gates of Lodore, they found the canyon to be dark and foreboding, "like a mountain drinking a river." As they began their descent into the canyon, they found the beauty of the vermilion colored walls touched by a hint of green to be awe inspiring. The name Lodore comes from that voyage, derived from an English poem recited by one of Powell's crew.

For years, only those daring enough to tackle the swift and mighty rapids visited the section of the Green in Lodore Canyon. Today, Flaming Gorge Dam upriver controls the waters and flows are regulated.

The river running season begins mid-May and lasts until mid-September. Trips are usually three or four days long, with overnight camping on sandy beaches within the canyon. All equipment and provisions are carried from the put-in to the take-out. The river corridor is well preserved and great care is taken to ensure that it will remain that way for generations to follow.

Without a doubt, this is the most beautiful stretch of the Green. Bright green Box Elder trees along pristine beaches contrast the steep, red canyon walls. Lodge pole pine and Douglas fir cling to the high ledges and canyon rims above. Wildlife abounds, with mountain sheep, mule deer and the recently reintroduced river otter. As you float through the tranquil canyon, you can almost hear the whisperings of trappers and explorers from an era long past. In the evenings around the campfire, river guides relate tales and feats of their bravery from years gone by. At bedtime, the soothing sound of the flowing river lapping at its banks gently lulls one to sleep.

There's plenty of excitement, too! Lodore Canyon has rapids with names like Disaster Falls, Hell's Half Mile and Triplet Falls. The average descent in the canyon is 13 feet per mile, with the lowest at one foot above Disaster and the greatest, a whopping 30 feet in Hell's Half Mile!

Trips launch right at the Gates of Lodore at the northernmost corner of Dinosaur National Monument. About 20 miles downriver, at the head of Lodore Canyon, the Yampa River cascades into the Green at Echo Park, site of the dramatic Steamboat Rock. The run continues through the placid waters of Whirlpool Canyon, allowing time to reflect on the surrounding wonders. Next up is the Canyon of Split Mountain, the final leg of the journey, and more whitewater, including Moonshine, S.O.B., Schoolboy and Inglesby rapids. Rafters will exit the river at Split Mountain Gorge, which is adjacent to the amazing Dinosaur Quarry. Here, dinosaur bones are on exhibit and visitors can observe paleontologists excavating fossil remains from the face of a stone cliff.

The Green River is an excellent place to get away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Here, one may enjoy the scenery and solitude with a big splash of excitement thrown in. Lodore Canyon is a perfect trip for everyone, including families looking for an introduction to the increasingly popular sport of whitewater rafting.