

My name is Chris Rhodes and my partner Sheryl and I have been long time URARA members, though we live in California. I had back surgery and we are sadly not able to attend the symposium in St. George this year. But, being that this is the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we were encouraged to tell some of our favorite rock art related memories, I thought that I'd share an adventure that we had in the Fall of 2010.

We travelled out from California and spent a few days exploring the San Rafael Reef, before meeting up with the legendary Morris Wolf in Hanksville. Many long-time members will know him from his beautifully painted shirts and hats featuring Barrier Canyon Style motifs. Though in his mid-70s, Morris can hike circles around people half his age and knows the canyon country around Hanksville better than any man living or dead.



We decided that we wanted to hike Horseshoe canyon, but our entry would be via the Deadman's trail, as it's called. The trailhead is opposite the Great Gallery and reached after a long rough 4wd road. It had rained off and on for several days prior, but that morning the skies looked pretty good and the canyon bottom was mostly dry. Horseshoe is mostly a fairly wide canyon, so we weren't too worried about getting trapped or washed away.





We made it down the steep but direct trail to the canyon bottom and began to explore. We walked up canyon for several hours. Not many people hike in this section and it was just beautiful, with almost no trace of other humans. We made it to near the mouth of Blue John canyon which is famously where hiker/climber/author Aron Ralston found himself stuck under a fallen rock, until he severed his arm and made his dramatic exit and was eventually rescued.

At this point it started to rain, lightly at first, and then much, much heavier. We had started back but then sought shelter as hailstones the size of grapes began to pelt us. At this point we figured that, hey, this is the desert, surely the storm will pass and we'll just have to wait it out.





Well, eventually the skies released their fury. Soon, we saw red water pouring into the canyon from nearly every overhang. It seemed as if the entire San Rafael desert was being drained into Horseshoe. We were concerned, but mostly in awe of the power of the forces of nature. These types of events, over the course of millions of years, are what create the canyons in the first place.





Soon, the once dry canyon floor was a raging torrent, and 15-foot-tall juniper trees were falling into the creek and flowing past us like giant rafts. At this point, we had been in the canyon for many hours and we knew that it would be getting dark soon. We resolved to attempt to exit the canyon. We put back on our soaking rain gear and started walking. We were on the eastern side of the canyon at this point. After a mile or so, we saw that we were ledged out. There would be no crossing here without getting wet.



So, back up canyon we went to try to cross to the other side of the canyon. It wasn't raining as hard and we knew that there was a debris catcher of sorts that spanned the creek at the boundary of the National Park. We all managed to climb and shuffle our ways across the debris dam, in spite of the flowing river below us. This was fairly easy for Sheryl and I, but Morris managed this with one hand, as he is missing an arm ! This is why he is a legend.









As we walked, we eventually got ledged out on the other side. By now the flow had subsided somewhat, and we were able to cross, though the water was still about thigh high. After crossing back and forth 3 more times we finally made it back to the trailhead and climbed up back to our vehicles. We were all soaked to the bone. Our tent had blown away and there was no sign of it. We slept in our trucks that night.

The next morning, it was mostly sunny and nice, of course ! We hiked around camp and found our brutalized tent about a quarter of a mile away, wrapped around a bush. We saved it for posterity's sake, but we never slept in it again.



As we drove out, we stopped at the Hans Flat Ranger station the next day. We told the ranger of our adventures and he informed us that a tornado had passed through western Canyonlands the day before ! This was no ordinary storm. As we drove out we saw huge Pinon Pines and Junipers that had been uprooted by the sheer force of this twister.



We parted ways with Morris, found a hotel, and eventually continued our trip down to Cedar Mesa in search of further adventure. We may have been partly crazy, partly stupid, but we made it back with one heck of a story to tell.

Chris Rhodes 9/12/2019