



Twice Named
“Colorado Company of the Year”!

River: Dolores River

Trip: 10-Day Ponderosa Gorge / Slickrock Canyon Whitewater Raft Trip, Class II - IV, 100 miles.

Meeting Place: Travelodge in Cortez, CO

Times: Meeting time is 8:15am, trips depart at 9:00am. Get back to the Travelodge in Cortez at about 5pm. River times outlined below are approximate.

Closest Major Airports: Durango – 2 Hours, Denver (DIA) – 6 hours.

Meals Provided: 10 Delicious smorgasbord lunches, 9 hearty dinners with dessert and 9 full breakfasts at camp.

Season: May - Mid June

Itinerary: Come explore the Dolores River on a great multi-day trip and experience the fun of self-contained overnight camping by the river. Wilderness Aware has specialized in running multi-day rafting trips since 1976. This experience gives us the competitive edge when it comes to organizing your adventure. The Dolores River is one of the last remaining unspoiled river trips in the West. The Ponderosa Gorge trip is not to be missed.

Day 1 - 8:15 am: You will meet your guides at the Travelodge in Cortez, CO, where they will check you in and give you a pre-trip briefing. The guides will be available to help pack your gear (camp clothing, toiletries, sleeping bag and pad) in a water-tight overnight bag. Everyone gets their very own souvenir insulated coffee mug to keep after the trip. Tents are packed away separately.

9:00 am: We'll hop on the bus or van and you will be transported across the high desert and down into the Dolores River Canyon near Bradfield Bridge, about 10 miles below the McPhee Reservoir dam. You will immediately feel the serenity and seclusion of the canyon.

9:45 am: After stretching out and unloading your personal bags, you can change into your river clothing in the new facilities provided by our government host. We'll make last minute adjustments to the gear boats and add your overnight bags to the load. Your trip leader will give you a comprehensive orientation and safety talk with plenty of time for questions. You will have the confidence needed to handle anything that comes up during the trip. Next, the guides who will outfit you in a Coast Guard approved life jacket and paddle. Helmets are optional on this section of river.

10:30 am: As we round the first couple of bends, we will begin passing large benches filled with towering Douglas fir and Ponderosa pines that line the shallow washes coming off the canyon walls. These stands of virgin forest give the upper canyon its name - Ponderosa Gorge.

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12:00 pm: At lunchtime alongside the river, our professional guides will prepare hors d'oeuvres and a hearty deli-style lunch. After eating, we have the option of pulling out the inflatable kayak or “ducky”. Paddled with a two bladed kayak paddle, the “ducky” allows you to take on the rapids individually. We have both one-person and two-person “duckies” available on our trips. After a short training demonstration by the trip leader and donning a helmet, you will be ready to take on the rapids of the Dolores.

1:00 pm: Fast and rollicking water keeps everyone on their toes and give the duckies time to adjust to piloting their own boats. The brilliantly colored canyon walls deepen and the scenery becomes even more breathtaking.

4:00 pm: Once we arrive at our riverside campsite nestled amongst the tall pines, we unload all the rafts and have an opportunity to change into camp clothes and set up tents. Guides will be on-hand to assist with setting up your camp. After a brief camp orientation where you'll become acquainted with the “Groover”, our solid waste toilet system and the camp routine, you will be free to take out your fishing pole, enjoy a refreshing swim, or hike.

7:00 pm: After unwinding for a couple of hours, the Guides will have put on their chef's hats and have a hot dinner ready for you. Some of the dinner entrees we offer are: Grilled Chicken, Steak and Salmon, Stir-Fry, Lasagna, and Enchiladas, followed up with a Dutch-oven cake. This is not pork-and-beans camping! After dinner you can relax with a cup of cocoa or tea under a blanket of stars playing cards, telling ghost stories, and re-living your adventures from the river.

Day 2 –7 am: In the morning, you'll wake up to the aroma of freshly brewed “Cowboy” coffee delivered to the door of your tent. When you get up, you'll see that camp is nearly in full swing and an array of fresh fruit, juice and other goodies available for you to nibble on. The smell of bacon in the air tells you breakfast is nearly ready. Our breakfast entrees may include blueberry pancakes, French toast, or Veggie eggs.

9:00 am: After you eat, it's time to pack up your tent and overnight bags and re-load the rafts for the day's river adventure. As you pass through this exceptional wilderness, it's not hard to imagine why the Anasazi Indian culture chose this location in which to live. In fact, we actually stop and take a look at some of the remains of the Anasazi – including a granary – evidence of a culture that lived here centuries before.

2:00 pm: We begin a series of some of the toughest rapids on the Dolores River today. The first river runner of the Dolores, Otis “Doc” Marsten, named the wildest rapid on this section Old Snaggletooth. This rapid is one of the most famous river runs in Colorado. A series of holes must first be navigated before threading the needle in-between the rocks of the Snaggletooth. You will be sure to get your adrenaline pumping before attempting this rapid!

Day 3 – On the third day, you'll be able to recall the mining history of Colorado as we pass by two abandoned uranium mines. The action doesn't stop though, as the Mile Long Rapids are still to go. After conquering these fun rapids, the river flattens out providing excellent opportunities to swim or jump in the “ducky” for those who would not be comfortable in rapids. We will pass the one and only highway bridge on the trip. Those that are joining us for only three days can leave the trip at this point. If you are one of the lucky ones, we'll keep going and really remove ourselves from the world in the canyons to come.

Day 4 – We enter the Slickrock Canyon section of the river. This canyon is also named Little Glen Canyon, as it features some of the same rock layers as Glen Canyon of the Colorado River – now buried under Lake Powell. Although Class III rapids pepper this run, Slickrock's allure is in its majestic beauty, a kaleidoscope of red, orange and white sandstone cliffs nearly 1200 ft. high. We come across more evidence of the Anasazi Indian culture. We stop and take a look at some pictographs and petroglyphs of the Anasazi.

Day 5 –As you raft through the heart of the Colorado Plateau, a cold, high desert environment, you will notice pinion pine and juniper scattered around sage and several varieties of cactus. In the riparian zones along the river, Box Elder and Cottonwood trees provide some welcome shade in the afternoon. Our camp tonight is near Coyote Wash, which is an excellent evening hike.

Day 6 – Today we pass through Muleshoe bend – a meander where the river nearly meets itself. After threading our way through several fun rapids, the river flattens out providing excellent opportunities to swim or jump back in the “ducky” for those who would not be comfortable in rapids.

2:00 pm: We pass our 2nd highway bridge of the trip today. We’ll fill our water jugs at the Bedrock Store and get an ice cream bar. This remarkable Old West store retains all the charm of the 1800’s. Most of the merchandise is behind the counter, just like it was in the old days. A scene from “Thelma and Louise” was filmed here.

3:00 pm: We’ll jump back on the river and head across Paradox Valley, an interesting geologic phenomenon where the river cuts across the valley rather than through the middle of it! This valley was extensively occupied by Pueblo Indian culture and was also famous in western history as a route through which rustlers traversed to sell stolen stock in the mining camps. In the spring, nesting waterfowl abound in the natural but unprotected refuge.

Day 7 - From here the river cuts through Paradox and Mesa Canyons where one can view remnants of an almost unbelievable "hanging flume". We will float parallel to Highway 141 in a broad and majestic canyon for the next 30 miles.

Day 8 - Near the town of Gateway the river plunges into Gateway Canyon where some of the most difficult rapids of the entire river are encountered.

Day 9 – A beautiful side hikes in remote side-canyons can be very similar to hikes up from the river in Grand Canyon side-creeks. Our last full day to savor separation from the busy and electronically connected world.

Day 10 - Some 30 miles below Gateway, Colorado, the Dolores River unites with the Colorado River at the historic “Dewy Bridge”. We leave our “real world” of camping, boating, and spending quality time with loved ones and friends behind. We’ll pack up and return to Cortez.

5:00 pm: Once back to Cortez, It’s time to unpack your bags and say good-bye to new found friends and reflect on this rapid-filled wilderness canyon trip. You may also choose to remember your trip with a T-shirt, hat or pair of shorts. There is no better way to spend 10 days!