

2011 September Slot Canyons, Escalante Region, Utah



<http://picasaweb.google.com/105214571300639154191?gsessionid=mlAKNM7CMLF7sRJgycF5dQ>

9/22/2011Thu

We arrived late at night at the Salt Lake airport. Jordan was ready and waiting but Jason was a bit behind. Good thing he is reliable because no recent communication had been had by our esteemed trip organizer. We didn't even have his phone number but Jason appeared as promised. A long lonely drive ensued landing us beyond Price in the middle of absolutely know here – and - everywhere we wanted to be. A lonely prairie with a long ago used cattle pen as backdrop was our bedroom.

9/23/2011 Fri



With no better than 4 hours sleep the sun graced our tent and a flurry of activity was launched. We broke camp, and traveled farther down the rugged road to the Eardley Canyon trailhead. Huge walls of sandstone graced with Indian drawing from ages ago played before us until Erik's impeccable rout finding skill (more on that later) told us to start up a steep ridgeline. This was glorious with breathtaking overview to the canyon we would be descending. We got a bit stretched out as the natural abilities and individuality of this collection of rock hounds expressed itself, but not too far. Finally we topped out at a chute and we descended sharply into a fantastic slot. It felt like the better part of 2000 feet of up and being such a hot day the cooler water of the long series of pot holes stretched out before us did not seem too intimidating.



Swim after swim slowly drained my reserve of warmth. With 5 of us, each hole demanding a rappel took time that in the shadows of the deep canyon walls slowly dropped my core until near the last couple of pots, my mild shaking became full leg cramps affecting several muscle groups. Jason, who was better prepared than the rest of us, broke out a Shorty wet suit and helped me into its warm cocoon. I Pulled my neoprene gaiters over my calves to shield my skin as much as possible. Ahhh so nice - Thanks Jason!!! My legs were so close to failure that Jason and then Erik took turns giving me a ski ride across the pond on the rope - Since I was doing the rigging, I was always the last one down. The final pot broke out into the bright desert sun and we all basked in its rays. Since my son Jordon, newcomer to our group was just taking a break from graduate studies in Nuclear Engineering, an abandon Uranium mine on the hillside was a must visit. We all return from this slot with



“glowing” reports of God’s spectacular handiwork.

When we rolled through a one-horse town with cell coverage, I called my sweet wife who was relishing time with a daughter & grandchild in Idaho. We spent our 33 anniversary with a few kind words and sweet nothings. After another interminably long drive that extended into the twilight brought us past our old haunt - the classic Egypt3 trailhead. I started a campfire which bewildered Erik who seemed ready to pass out. I just love to unwind as the embers dance and cast their spell under the explosion of stellar grandeur; nothing like it to savor every moment. Chris, Jordon and I talked a while on points of theology and church history and then slipped into our tents for a well deserved respite.

Link to Eric’s Journal: <http://www.canyonclimber.com/rafael/eardley/>

9/24/2011 Sat

Neon Canyon Journey video link: <http://youtu.be/yPV8B70dQw4>

I think we got a good solid 7 hours sleep this time and I & more especially Jordon desperately needed that after many weeks of 4 & 5 hour nights studying and caring for his family. I know you can’t catch up in one night but it felt good. Another dusty drive brought us to the very popular Neon Canyon trailhead. We checked the register and found to our delight that we would likely have the entire region to ourselves. The carpet of painted sandstone swirled and flowed down to the Escalante river far below. Jason and Chris where like run-away horses anxious to get to greener pasture. Stopping for even a moment to adjust a pack would get you lost in their dust. The immediate stretch-out of the group got even Erik to holler some mild epitaphs at our distant comrades. (Apologies rendered later) There is an internal impelling to race on even if it means stop and wait that sometimes creates a bit of tension and too often lost parties! The irony is that placing a slightly slower person at the lead will often cause the best performance to be exuded rather than the depressing catch-up game. This is a key lesson of brotherhood from Philmont I learned many years ago. Takes time...

We ate lunch at the Escalante river and then waded in to the only slightly cool thigh high flow (knee high for the 6’ crowd) . We debated a place to camp and pressed on to better digs downriver and after slogging and bushwhacking another mile, we found a stunning camp on a sandbar surrounded by grand bluffs and looking into Neon Canyon watershed.

Link to Eric’s Journal: <http://www.canyonclimber.com/escalante/Choprocks/>

After setting up camp we headed back up river to find Chockrock Canyon. Slogging upriver is very hard and so we found something that passed for a trail and followed it. Rugged and closed, strewn with sticker bushes and spiked with man eating branches to impale the walkers were steady fair but then us

followers in the back began to question the direction for our winding path. Eric made a cursory GPS check on his brother's route and confirmed the direction. I grumbled "it sure feels like we are doubling back!" but on we went until suddenly we burst out from the undergrowth like so many rabbits under the bramble to view our camp's sandbar! Chris uttered a very rare "I am humbled." Others, like me, who would not normally be trusted with directions, basked in the moment and then we changed leads and plunged back into the bramble. This roundabout however took its toll on Jason and Jordon who also appreciate the value of downtime and so they sat down and didn't move. Chris and Eric plunged on to scout out ahead with me in relay position. Barely a hundred yards later... "Chockrock Canyon ahoy," I hollered to the now retreating mutineers but they were done and continued heading downstream to camp.

Chris, Erik and I proceeded up Chockstone canyon taking in immense overhanging cliffs and even a long ago



cowboy camp and a tarantula. I mused about bringing that back to camp since Jason was sleeping out in the open, but no suitable container was handy. We went up river one branch to a rappel that marked the terminus of a hugely difficult slot that claimed the lives of a couple coeds last year. We then took the other branch of the canyon that narrowed to a handsome dry slot – with no end in sight.

We had a feast planned with steaks and such and with companions back at camp and lengthening shadows to remind us we needed to turn back. Chris had severe canyon fever at this point and worked hard on the numbers to eke out the longest possible turnaround time. I knew the drill



when the turnaround time came, new numbers were introduced to stretch out another ½ hour. I plunged on with reduced enthusiasm. When that next increment passed I slowed a bit trying to give a hint when Chris just bolted in a full run up canyon. I grumbled and turned to go back to camp alone. Erik turned to look back and a bit consternated followed his brother farther up canyon.

I guessed that they figured they'd be so fast, they could likely run up a ways and run down and still catch me before I, even with a brisk walking pace, could exit the canyon and enter the river. Almost true. I waited at the river 5 minutes and then, not really knowing what became of them, I plunged in to head back to camp best could (I would just need to be careful and watchful. I'm not great at route-finding but not entirely a dolt. After the river crossing I entered the man eating brush but then I began to hear some distant but welcome voices. Of course I was not too sympathetic about – “ we just wanted to see that one more bend” but that is the way with family; it's a package deal and still a good one at that. On the way back I spotted this fellows ordeal. Id say he was having a bad day!



Once back in camp, we cooked up Corn on the cob, steaks and various dehydrated foods. Jordon sang Happy birthday to me as I celebrated my 55th birthday. What a blessing to be able to do what I am doing ; able to keep up (almost) with my daddy long legged younger friends and share these precious moments with brothers who all know the Lord. Sleep again came easily under a star studded canopy.

9/25/2011 Sun

Video of Neon, Choprock and Ringtail <http://youtu.be/yPV8B70dQw4>



Today would be a relatively easy day visiting the very famous Neon Canyon. I gathered the climbing rope that Jordon had brought and ribbons, some emergency gear and we all shuffled uncomfortably out of camp to a easy ridge hike above Neon. I keep looking for words but the majesty of God's creations were simply stunning. The next event bore some ironic humor for all concerned, At some point, high on a majestic ridge, Erik spoke the words that each of us were thinking; "You know we didn't say prayer this morning ..." Yeh I replied and what would the content of that prayer be exactly?" This was a matter

of some thought as "resting on the Sabbath" is well ingrained in each of us. Eric opined that a prayer of forgiveness might be in order. Chris offered that a prayer of gratitude was better. We all like that one so we unanimously dubbed Chris' as the best and collectively we bowed our heads in thanks. That was way

better than guilt and we proceeded in praise.



Link to Eric's journal
<http://www.canyonclimber.com/escalante/neon/>

Jordon and I set up a rappel to enter the slot, Since ALL of my climbing gear had been inadvertently left at home, I had constructed a swami belt for a harness and using a borrowed carabineer did my rappel with a munter hitch. With a double rope I had very good control, We walked a short distance passed emerald pools and then shimmied down an almost vertical expanding chute into the narrow water-

filled channel deep in the slot, I found this rather challenging – precarious as my friction index was just barely sufficient with great care to keep myself from plunging down, I wanted to enter the water gracefully, We each spotted each other and soon we were all in the tank. Quite cool, the wet suits were very helpful, With dry-bags in each of our packs for buoyancy, we variously swam, kicked or bobbed our way a good hundred yards to the far side but a some point I must have slipped under as I am being treated for Guardia as of this writing! Ohhhh. Finally, it opened briefly to the warm sun. A lone flower struck high from the floor and we talked a moment about our good wives who enable much of our adventure. The spectacular finally was then before us. The ceiling of a great arch amphitheater opening to the valley below was punched with two great holes by the frequent flow of water.



Eighty feet straight below was a pond to land in. When my turn came, I slid my heavy water-logged pack off and down the sandstone corkscrew to the gaping hole it flew. WhoooooshWhoump it exploded far

below to the shock of my companions who feared someone had slipped. “Did you get that on video” I hollered, “No” Oh darn I thought the cameras were rolling. Next and last as usual was me, surrounded by the immensity of this natural theater; I played Spiderman on my dangling thread.



Link to Eric’s Journal:

<http://www.canyonclimber.com/escalante/ringtail/>

After lunch we headed downriver a mile to a dank dark and narrow slot called ringtail. This time Jason was in the lead and to my surprise scampered up this cave with ease. I say surprised because he has a bigger chest than the rest of us and has had to bale before, but this time he push right on through. It was a squeeze in some places and a bit tricky requiring good balance and strength moves in a

few other places. Fortunately the wading was only to below my waist. Finally with the day a bit long we encountered a keeper hole that would require a human ladder to circumvent. We could have done it for sure but we had our fill and returned whence we came. On the way back we found an immense smooth red wall littered with petroglyphs – many ancient – some from the cowboy years and a few even earlier which greatly annoyed some of us –We could understand any of the ancient scribbles but it was no easier to understand the “modern” ones either.

There was some talk about breaking camp and hiking out but I suggested THAT really WAS work and it would be hard to extend our tenuous justification further. Back at camp as the evening gave us another brilliant canopy of stars, we played with Jason’s powerful green laser and fanned it in front of the campfire creating a time machine vortex like structure in the smoke – That is so cool.

9/26/2011 Mon



Thunder clouds threatened us briefly in the morning which impelled us to a fast teardown of camp. I commented as we slogged upstream and then up the steep sandstone mountain that the cloud-cover was a blessing that we would not have share had we left on the Sabbath. Only the last few hundred yards did we finally break free of our welcome cloud cover. Even with that welcome cover we were all sweat-soaked by the time we topped out. Jason broke out

his cornucopia of goodies from his ice cooler and the rest of us did the same creating a nice combined feast. We met a Swiss couple there who were intent on seeing Neon Canyon (from the bottom) but were terribly ill prepared in terms of direction, Chris having served his mission in Switzerland chatted freely in their native tongue and Erik transferred his GPS coordinates into their GPS device. They would not have made it!

The drive out was more dust and rumble until we encountered another German tourist waving us down. They had a flat tire and did not know what to do about it. Astonishing and all by themselves no less! We had everything we needed to get them going again – even patching the hole and refilling the tire. It set us back a good ½ hour which made my slot bagging companions a bit nervous as we still had a big climb in front of us, but the couple was very grateful. Tried to slip us a few \$20s but I feigned to accept it but quickly chucked it into their care ending the impasse satisfactorily. Chris told them the best way to thank us was to invite the missionaries in Germany to dinner which I'm sure they will be well disposed to do. Off in the cars we rode and rode on a rough and frequently washed out back road until we came to a grand overlook to Brimstone Canyon

Brimstone Video: <http://youtu.be/y6zDr5YZ4Ko>

Link to Eric's Journal: <http://www.canyonclimber.com/escalante/brimstone/>

Jordon was feeling rather sick so he opted to stay at his car tighten a squeaking fan belt and study. The rest of us shoulder our daypacks and descended, this was a grand long long slot canyon very reminiscent of Egypt3 but the narrow section was fantastically long and so squished only the guidebook and my larger companions in front of me gave me any confidence that it could be traversed.



The return trip was overland as was the habit of the author of our guidebook but his directions this time were simply bad. At one point having got ourselves strung out on a precarious steeply sloping ridge we began to mutter unpleasant comments. About that time we actually found a tattered copy of the guidebook tossed by some previous sojourner – most likely similarly disgusted by his poor ambiguous writings. We declined to remove the relic as it provided a perfect metaphor. Chris was dedicated to seeing some arch mentioned in the book and up and down and up and down we went over the exfoliated sandstone domes and ridges trying to find it until it was obvious with waning daylight we needed to vector as straight as possible to our cars. He was disappointed (one more bend) but we all meandered back – each taking a route of our own choosing but slowly closed in on each other – did I mention the

intense individualism of our crowd!

Another interminable long 4 hr drive back north in the wee hours of the night finally deposited us near Goblin State park. Camp was full – suits us fine, but we found an even better spot – one of the coolest creepiest spots I have ever camped in – the area holding up to its namesake.

9/27/2011 Tue

Clear skies gently woke us from slumber and I made a hardy pancake and fried spam breakfast for everyone. Jordon was still feeling a bit under the weather so when it came time to hike to some cave Chris had discovered a decade earlier, he declined and just enjoyed the strange solace of this unreal – almost otherworldly place. Hike is not really the right term – to squeeze in two goals meant double time and even a bit of jogging down the desert paths, I followed with my fastest pace but I still did not get why a mud hole in the ground was worth this heroism. It took a couple of tries but find it he did. A turns out to be a very cool very large melted ice crème cave fit for Ali-baba with mud stalagmites and dribbling flows everywhere to decorate its every surface. Very cool and hardly a mud hole in the ground.



Snapping pictures like crazy, I lagged a bit behind capturing my companions against backdrops found nowhere else on the planet.



They then wanted to make a quick ascent to the mountain (big hill) before us. Chris had discovered the a secret way to the inaccessible pinnacle and had actually proposed to a former girlfriend there, but my four day

aroma and the call of a camp shower coupled with my lack of faith in their timely return held sway. After visiting the restroom and reading a few interpretive signs, I was astonished to see the trio standing on the peak! Wow they did move fast! I moved fast too – to the shower. On returning to the trailhead I dried out some more next to a huge hoodoo.

Erik and Jason appeared but no (just one more picture) Chris. Jordan shuttled the cars to try and make one available for him as Jason and Erik showered. In short order Chris too appeared and taking a record fast shower we all assembled for a final group picture in Goblin valley before driving off into the sunset!

