

**RAFTING TRIP:** Jackson says highlight of trip was “every day”

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the other group members. Social dynamics on such a long trip can be an important factor and the group turned out to be a good combination. His river experience landed him a position as one of the rowers, which he saw as a tremendous opportunity.

“It’s a crown jewel for any rower to be on the Colorado,” he said. “The magnitude of the river and the canyon is hard to describe in words. I felt that getting to do this at all was a combination of luck (through the lottery) and my river experience coming together at the right time.”

When asked about highlights of the trip he responded: “Every day.”

He felt grateful that he got to experience the biggest water of his river career.

“I was excited but also nervous,” he said. “Thankfully none of our rafts ever flipped, so not having any ‘carnage’ was a blessing. I can still visualize in my mind some of those rapids, though.”

On one of the first big rapids, however, Jackson did face an unusual test.

“One of my oar blades slipped off right as we were entering class-8 rapids, but I navigated that, though it was a bit more adventurous than I had hoped, which boosted both my own and my wife’s confidence in me as a rower.”

“About four or five days into the trip, I realized I had no idea what day it was,” he said. “Time didn’t matter. It was all about sun-up and sundown.”

Little did he know that soon the rest of the country would begin to experience a similar feeling once the “stay at home” orders were put in place.

The group contracted a company that prepped all the food and gear for them, which cut down the preparation time significantly.

“We got our money’s worth,” said Jackson.

“I was in awe every day, being in the canyon,” he said. “We took four or five hikes into side canyons, which was pretty cool as well. There’s just so much beauty every day.”

It was about midway of the trip that news of the outside world’s growing pandemic reached Jackson’s group.

“About nine or 10 days in, we were stopped at Phantom Ranch where we swapped out three of our members for three new ones,” he said. “They shared news of the spread of the virus that included quite a few deaths in the Seattle area and that people were beginning to get pretty concerned about where things were headed, but not much else.”

Three or four days later, when the group stopped at Havasu Canyon, the news had shifted a bit more.

“We talked to some people who had hiked down who told us that the recreational area would be closing down the following day, along with National Parks, due to the virus.”

“When we got to Diamond Creek around March 20 we ran into a park ranger who told us schools were closing, businesses are closing, flights are canceled and all sorts of stuff,” he said. “That’s when it really made us realize that something big was really happening.”

With no way of communicating to family and friends until they completed the trip, the group was left to move on down the river.

“I think we tried not to think too much about it for the rest of the trip since we

couldn’t do anything anyway, but people were definitely having side conversations, especially considering about half of our group was made up of doctors, nurses, mental health professionals and other health occupations,” Jackson said.

The final night of the trip the group chose to float overnight in the calm waters, which is a common practice.

“You can sleep on the raft under the night sky and it’s very peaceful, which was a good way to finish things, especially considering what we were about to encounter in the outside world,” he said.

“When we landed at Pearce Ferry above Lake Mead on March 24, the woman from the company there to pick us up, quickly circled us up before even greeting us and read to us a CDC briefing,” he said. “She told us ‘The world you are entering is not the world you left.’”

The group was briefed on sanitation and social distancing practices.

“We were all still experiencing ‘river brain’ so it was hard to take it all in,” he said. “It was surreal. It wasn’t like dreamland or like a nightmare, but something in between.”

About 90 minutes into the drive back to Flagstaff, Arizona where most of the group had cars parked, cell service returned and the sound of pings from text messages and emails on phones filled the 15-passenger van, according to Jackson.

“All of us had 30 to 50 texts or voicemails which began the process of seeing how our individual lives were being impacted,” he

said. “Some in the group were discovering life-changing information about their jobs and future plans right there in the van.”

Jackson contacted his principal, Alison Haney, at Sisters Middle School and was relieved to know that his job was intact.

“In fact she said something like, ‘You have more work to do than ever.’”

Jackson’s original plan was to drive back home from Flagstaff, while Marie would fly, but they chose to stay together.

“At first, though, I had no idea what it would be like,” he said. “Would gas be \$10 a gallon and would any businesses even be open?”

Before splitting up the group divided up some supplies including hand sanitizer, toilet paper, and snack food.

“We honestly didn’t know if we were headed into a full-blown apocalypse or what,” he said.

He had hoped to have some closure with his group after such an amazing trip, but with all of the upheaval, “I just wanted to get home... get back to my dog.”

Once back to his home in Bend, he felt grateful that Sisters was still on spring break.

“It gave me the chance to get my wits about me before

diving back into work, which has also changed dramatically,” he said.

Looking back on what he learned from the trip that he could pass on to his students at Sisters Middle School he said, “I suppose that experiencing, day-after-day, a certain amount of healthy stress and fear is what helps us grow is a good message to young people. I mean, there were 10 rapids on the Colorado that were the biggest ones I have ever guided a raft through. I grew a ton.”

“It’s a crown jewel for any rower to be on the Colorado.”  
— Brook Jackson

When it comes to dealing with the pandemic Jackson had some lessons from the river as well.

“When you are on the river you are so in the moment and you don’t need to think much beyond the next bend, the next rapids, or where you are going to camp that night,” he said. “Maybe that’s a message that is sort of helpful right now. Control what you can control, take care of yourself and keep things simple.”

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**SUDOKU SOLUTION**

for puzzle on page 21

5	6	2	7	4	1	9	8	3
4	3	1	8	5	9	6	2	7
9	7	8	6	3	2	5	4	1
2	9	6	4	8	3	1	7	5
3	4	5	9	1	7	8	6	2
8	1	7	2	6	5	4	3	9
7	8	3	1	9	6	2	5	4
1	2	4	5	7	8	3	9	6
6	5	9	3	2	4	7	1	8

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