

Safe Boating Suggestions for Glen Canyon and Horseshoe Bend

The 16 mile stretch of the Colorado River from Lees Ferry to Glen Canyon Dam offers a glimpse of what Glen Canyon and the Colorado River looked like prior to the construction of the dam and Lake Powell. This is the last free flowing remnant of this great canyon that once stretched for a couple hundred miles and crossed two states. Today, this river is “controlled” by Glen Canyon Dam which powers the west with electricity and provides water to millions of households.

People travel to the stretch of river for the great rainbow trout fishing as well as the scenic beauty. A fraction of the visitors who view the canyon (Horseshoe Bend) get to experience the true splendor that this canyon has to offer...the unparalleled view from the river.

Boating this stretch of river in kayaks and canoes has exploded in popularity the last few years. This float can be an experience of a lifetime, but is not without danger when unprepared.

This stretch of river has CONSIDERABLE MOTORIZED BOAT TRAFFIC...it is after all, a NAVAGABLE RIVER. This requires everyone who is floating the river in a low-profile boat (kayak, canoe or raft) to be aware of special safety concerns. Always know that a boat headed your way might not see you. There can be a lot of glare on the water and reflections from the canyon which make small boats blend into the background. Here are some simple steps to help keep you safe while floating this stretch of river.

- Never float in the middle of the river or the main channel. Always keep your boat closer to the side of the river where the larger boat traffic does not run. If a boat is headed your way, paddle towards the closest shore.
- Be aware of the color of your clothing, PFD and boat. Always choose a bright color; never wear brown, green or blue which can blend in with the background. Choose red, orange or yellow... colors that really stand out.
- Do not expect the large motor boats to slow down as they pass you. These boats will produce a large wake that can swamp a small floating boat. Always orient your boat into a wake as the wave approaches. Never overload your boat as a heavy boat can be easily capsized or swamped.
- Always wear a USCG approved flotation device PFD; properly adjusted, zipped and buckled. This can save your life in case you capsize.
- Never overload your boat. Overloaded boats can capsize and swamp. Pay attention to the carrying capacity of your boat and add your weight to the weight of your gear. Try to keep the weight well below the suggested maximum weight of the boat.
- Be aware of rocks close to shore. These rocks might not be readably visible from an upstream viewpoint and can easily snag and capsize a floating boat. Plan ahead and paddle around areas of rocks or turbulent water.
- If you find yourself in the water, go with the flow of the current, do not try to swim against the current. Look to exit the water as quickly as possible by seeking out a shallow area to swim to or a calm area on a rocky shore. Do everything that you can to get warm quickly to offset any potential hypothermia.
- Always try to paddle on the shore that is not a steep cliff face, seek out the side of river that offers a gradual sloping sand or dirt bank so that you can always paddle your boat or swim to shore if you need to.

- Always scan the river in front of you for shallow areas. Because of the fluctuations in water level, shallow areas change often. There are several areas of the river that are shallow and have a fast current and even a shallow draft boat can quickly become grounded, stuck or capsized. Plan to paddle around these shallow areas. If you ever run aground and your boat becomes sideways to the current, never step out of the boat on the downstream side. (You lighten the boat up and it could float over you).
- Floating this river is a wilderness experience and there will be times that there are no other boats or people on the river. Be prepared for an emergency whether it be weather, medical, or accident. Carry a lighter or matches, flashlight, change of clothing, rain jacket, cell phone, whistle, medications, extra food and water. If you have an allergy to bee or wasp stings be sure to bring Benadryl or an epi-pen. An adequate first aid kit is always a good idea. All this gear should be in a water tight bag.
- Dehydration can be a serious risk when the weather is hot. Have plenty of fluids to drink. The best way to do this is to have a water filter for producing your own drinking water from the river. Do not under any circumstances drink unfiltered water from the river.
- While on the river be aware that there is the possibility that you can encounter rattlesnakes and scorpions on the shore. Rattlesnakes are rare, but do inhabit the river corridor. If encountered, give them space and leave them alone. Scorpions are most active after dark. Shake out any clothing that has been-on the ground before you put it on.
- Always be prepared to spend a night on the river if the wind or weather becomes dangerous.
- If an emergency occurs, try dialing 911...cell phones do work in certain stretches of river. Sometimes a text will connect when a call will not...text friends or family members and ask them to seek help on your behalf. Remember, you are in a wilderness environment that has limited and difficult access. If an emergency does occur, it may take several hours for help to reach you especially at night.
- Always leave a trip plan with friends or family with a planned "check in" time or date when you start the trip and when you finish.
- Do not attempt to paddle into large waves created by winds. Paddle close to shore where the waves are small and always leave yourself the option of pulling into shore and waiting out the wind or storm even if this means staying overnight.
- If you have an emergency, flag other boaters down by raising both arms over your head and repeatedly cross and uncross them. This is a recognized symbol for requiring assistance.
- When camping, before nightfall, be sure to put away and stow all food into containers. This will prevent ringtail cats raiding your food supplies.
- NPS provides outhouses along the river. Plan to use these facilities whenever nature calls. It is permissible when necessary or convenient to pee in the river and onto the wet sand next to the river.
- If a boat is anchored and fishing plan to pass the boat as far away as you can to avoid disturbing the fishermen or the fish that they are fishing to.