Your Steps Matter

BY ZACHARY POWERS

A lush forest stretches across the landscape of southeast Utah, but it isn’t your typical forest. Instead of trees, soils draped in mosses, lichens and fungi rise up in rugged spires across the desert. Hidden from view, cyanobacteria move through the soil and bind loose particles together in a fibrous web, forming a living, “biological” crust across the desert.

Like trees, biological soil crust prevents erosion, anchoring soil in place and creating a stable environment where seeds can germinate.

Like trees, biological soil crust traps nutrients and water, making these essential elements more available to surrounding plants.

Like a forest, biological soil crust is a complex community of organisms that plays a significant role in ecosystems where it’s found.

Like a forest, biological soil crust may appear unremarkable when it’s young. However, this forest is tiny. So tiny that it can be clear-cut (or trampled) by something as small as the human foot.

In fact, many human activities negatively affect the presence and health of soil crusts. Compressional stresses placed on them by footprints or machinery are extremely harmful, especially when the crusts are dry and brittle. Tracks in continuous strips, such as those produced by vehicles or bicycles, create areas that are vulnerable to wind and water erosion. Rainfall washes away loose material, often creating channels along these tracks, especially on slopes.

Impacted areas may never fully recover. Under the best circumstances, a thin crust may return in five to seven years. Damage done to the fibrous web, and the accompanying loss of soil nutrients, is repaired slowly during up to 50 years of cyanobacterial growth. Lichens and mosses may take even longer to recover.

Your steps really do matter.

Help us protect desert soils. Walk on trails, on rock or in sandy washes (where water flows when it rains), and keep all vehicles and bikes on designated roads.

Learn more about desert soils on our website at go.nps.gov/soilcrust

Humble beginnings: young soil crusts may have very little relief, so keep your feet on trails, slickrock or washes.

Old growth: draped in lichens, mature crusts like these stabilize soils and provide safe haven for seeds, like this Utah juniper.
Explore the Backcountry

Backpacking
What better way to connect with this wilderness of countless canyons than on foot? Canyonlands offers hundreds of miles of hiking trails with designated campsites, as well as vast primitive areas where hikers find their own campsite (without damaging any soil crusts along the way, see page 1). Be prepared to navigate using a topographic map.

THINGS TO KNOW
• Permits are required for overnight trips.
• Spring & fall are best times for backpacking.
• There are very few water sources. Plan to bring most, if not all of your own water.

WHERE TO GO
• Island in the Sky for short day hikes, Needles for longer hikes or backpacking, Maze for extended backpacking trips.

Mountain Biking
With hundreds of miles of four wheel-drive roads, Canyonlands offers ideal terrain for multi-day mountain bike trips. Most groups travel with vehicle support to haul water and gear since there are no reliable water sources along these roads. Bikes must remain on designated roads: even if broken down and carried, there are no single-track trails in the park.

THINGS TO KNOW
• Permits are required for all overnight trips.
• Permits are required for day trips on the White Rim and most Needles Roads.
• Groups must camp in designated sites.
• Reserve White Rim permits in advance.

WHERE TO GO
• The 100-mile “White Rim Road” is the park’s most famous ride. The Maze offers similar terrain, but the roads are more technical and remote.

Boating
The Colorado and Green rivers played a significant role in shaping the landscape of Canyonlands, and both offer an interesting way to visit the park. Above their confluence, the rivers offer miles and miles of flat water perfect for canoes, sea kayaks and other shallow-water boats. Below the confluence, the combined flow of both rivers spills down Cataract Canyon with remarkable speed and power, creating a fourteen-mile stretch of Class III to V white water.

THINGS TO KNOW
• Permits are required for all river trips.
• Spring & fall are best times for boating.

WHERE TO GO
• High water is late May through June.
• There are no designated camps on the rivers.

Four-wheel Driving
There are hundreds of miles of 4WD roads in Canyonlands, providing access to various campsites, trailheads and viewpoints in the park. High-clearance, low range 4WD vehicles are required for most of these roads: all-wheel-drive vehicles are not allowed because of difficulty negotiating the ledges, deep sand and steep switchbacks found throughout the park. Vehicles must remain on designated roads.

THINGS TO KNOW
• Permits are required for all overnight trips.
• Permits are required for day trips on the White Rim Road and most Needles Roads.
• Expect towing fees over $1,500 for any vehicles disabled in the backcountry.
• Groups must camp in designated sites.

WHERE TO GO
• ATVs, UTVs, OHVs, even if registered, and non-street legal dirt bikes are not permitted.

Climbing
The Island in the Sky offers the most opportunities for climbing. Little climbing is done in the rest of the park due to the poor rock quality and a lack of established routes.

THINGS TO KNOW
• Permits are required for overnight trips and day trips on the White Rim Road.
• Special regulations apply. (see page 5).
• Slacklining or highlining is not permitted.
• Permits are required for overnight trips.

WHERE TO GO
• Most technical climbing occurs on the cliffs and towers at the Island in the Sky.

Packrafting
Packrafting can be a great way to link all districts of the park together.

THINGS TO KNOW
• Permits are required for overnight trips and must include the nights spent on the river.
• Special regulations and required equipment apply (see sidebar on page 8).

Guided Trips
Travel to backcountry areas requires planning, experience and equipment that is often expensive. For park visitors without the resources or inclination to plan their own excursions, guided trips offer the perfect way to experience the wonders of Canyonlands.

Guided trips are offered by local outfitters for hiking, biking, four-wheel driving and river running. Some companies combine a variety of these activities, and trips may vary in length from one to many days. In addition to planning your trip down to the last detail, outfitters also offer expert guides who will enrich your journey with their knowledge of the area's cultural and natural history.

For a list of outfitters approved by the National Park Service, visit our website at www.nps.gov/cany/planyourvisit/guidedtrips.htm
Exploring the canyons of the Maze (top) and the Colorado River.

Permits

Much of Canyonlands is managed for its wilderness character, so the park is a popular destination for backcountry travel. Hundreds of miles of rugged trails and roads wind through the park. Activities requiring a permit include backpacking, four-wheel-drive and mountain bike camping, river trips, and four-wheel-drive day use on the White Rim Road in the Island in the Sky District, and Elephant Hill, Salt Creek/Horse and Lavender canyons in the Needles District. Fees are charged and group size limits apply (see chart below).

LENGTH OF STAY

Permits (except day use) can be issued for up to fourteen consecutive nights. Backpackers may stay up to seven consecutive nights in any one site or zone (ten nights in the Maze zones). Visitors using the designated vehicle camps may stay a maximum of three consecutive nights at a site before having to relocate to another area.

DAY USE: FOUR-WHEEL-DRIVE, MOTORCYCLE, AND MOUNTAIN BIKE

A permit is required for ALL four-wheel-drive (includes motorcycles) and mountain bike day trips on the following roads:
- White Rim:
- Elephant Hill;
- Salt Creek/Horse Canyon;
- Lavender Canyon.

OBTAINING A PERMIT

Permit reservations are available on Recreation.gov (see sidebar). Due to the high demand for these permits, reservations are highly recommended. Campsites not reserved online will be available in person at the park's visitor centers and at the National Park Service headquarters in Moab, on a first-come, first-served basis, during normal business hours and seasons of operation. Twenty-five of the fifty day use permits available each day for the White Rim Road, and any permits not reserved online for the Needles District, will be available in person at the park's visitor centers or at the National Park Service headquarters in Moab, on a first-come, first-served basis during normal business hours and seasons of operation.

In instructions on how to obtain your permit will be provided once you reservation has been processed through Recreation.gov. Trip leaders must have a printed copy of their permit with them during their trip.

WATER

Water is a limiting factor for most backcountry trips in Canyonlands. There are springs scattered throughout the park, mostly in canyon bottoms. There are also large areas such as the Grabens in the Needles, and the entire White Rim bench at the Island, where there are no reliable water sources. Obtaining drinking water from either the Green or Colorado rivers is difficult as the water is very silty and hard to purify. Hikers are encouraged to pack in water whenever possible. Springs shown on maps may no longer exist or dry up during periods of drought. Water source locations and current conditions are available at district visitor centers. Plan on needing at least a gallon per person per day.

RESERVING A PERMIT

Backcountry Permits: All permit reservations for the 2021 season and beyond will be available at Recreation.gov. All overnight Backcountry permit reservations will be available at four months in advance for each of the following seasons and will close two days prior to the trip start date. On the opening dates, permits are released at 8:00am Mountain Time. The season dates are:
- March 10 - June 9 (opens November 10)
- June 10 - September 9 (opens February 10)
- September 10 - December 9 (opens May 10)
- December 10 - March 9 (opens August 10).

Day Use Permits, Four-Wheel-Drive, Motorcycle, and Mountain Bike: A permit is required for ALL four-wheel-drive (includes motorcycles) and mountain bike day trips on the following roads:
- White Rim (50 vehicles and 50 bicycles per day);
- Elephant Hill (24 vehicles and 12 bicycles per day);
- Salt Creek/Horse Canyon (10 vehicles and 7 bicycles per day);
- Lavender Canyon (8 vehicles and 7 bicycles per day).

Permits are available at 8:00am Mountain Time online one day in advance. Any permits not reserved online and one half of permits for the White Rim Road (25) will be available in person at the park's visitor center and park headquarters backcountry permit office on a first-come, first-served basis during normal business hours and seasons of operation.

NOTE: A day use permit is not required if ONLY travelling up or down the Shafer Trail and along the road to Potash. A permit is required beyond the restroom at the bottom of the Shafer Trail on the White Rim Road including out to Musselman Arch.

River Permits: All Cataract Canyon and Flatwater overnight permit reservations will be available at four months in advance for each of the following seasons and will close two days prior to a trip start date. The season dates are:
- April 14 – October 15 (opens December 14)
- October 16 – April 13 (opens June 15)

Cataract Canyon and Flatwater day use permits will be available one day in advance online.

Weather and Climate Statistics

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(temperatures measured in degrees Fahrenheit)

| Precipitation | J | F | M | A | M | J | A | S | O | N | D |
|---------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rain (inches) | .63| .29| 1.07| .76| .71| .50| 1.15| .92| .69| 1.0| .86| .60 |
| Snow (inches) | 5.5| 1.2| 2.8| 3.4| 0.2| -| -| -| -| 0.5| 3.3| 2.4 |
| Poss. Sun (%) | 56| 64| 60| 68| 74| 83| 77| 79| 80| 75| 63| 60 |
| # Thunderstorms | 0| 0| 1| 1| 4| 4| 9| 11| 5| 2| 0| 0|

Backcountry Trip Planner 3
Island in the Sky

The view from Green River Overlook.

VISITOR SERVICES
Visitor center is open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily (except some winter holidays), with extended hours spring through fall. Backcountry permits available during business hours. Water bottles can be filled at the visitor center (refillable bottles may be purchased). Water is not available elsewhere. Willis Flat Frontcountry Campground is open year-round on a first-come, first-served basis. There are 12 sites with tables, fire grills and vault toilets. The access road is paved. Firewood and water are not available. Maximum group size is 10 people. Sites are $15/night.

HIKING TRAILS
Island backcountry trails generally begin on the mesa top and descend via switchbacks to the White Rim bench. A few trails continue down to one of the rivers. Most are considered strenuous, with an elevation change of 1,000–2,000 feet, and require negotiating steep slopes of loose rock as well as sections of deep sand. The most popular long trails are described below.

Gooseberry
Length: 5.5mi/8.7km round-trip
Start: Gooseberry Trailhead
This trail descends steep switchbacks to a boulder-strewn wash that leads to the White Rim Road. At large camping in the Gooseberry/Lathrop Zone below the White Rim Road. No water.

Murphy Loop
Length: 11mi/17.7km round-trip
Start: Murphy Point Trailhead
A few miles of hiking on the mesa top leads to a steep descent down a cliff face to a bench where the trail divides. One fork continues along Murphy Hogback. At Murphy camp, hikers follow the White Rim Road south for about a mile, then follow a rock strewn wash back up onto the hogback. At-large backcountry in the Upper Basins Zone. No water.

Syncline Loop
Length: 8mi/13km round-trip
Start: Upheaval Dome Trailhead
This strenuous trail follows the washes on either side of Upheaval Dome, forming a loop that provides access inside the crater and to the Green River. Total elevation change is roughly 1,300 feet. Trail climbs some steep, exposed grades. North side of the loop passes through a riparian area where water and shade may be available. There is one designated Syncline campsite along the trail.

Taylor Canyon
Length: 18mi/29km round-trip
Start: Alcove Spring Trailhead
Trail descends via steep switchbacks to a rocky wash that leads into this broad, steep-walled canyon. Hikers can follow the four-wheel drive road returning via Upheaval Canyon/Syncline Loop. At large camping in the Taylor Canyon Zone.

BACKPACKING
The Island is a challenging place to backpack. The landscape below the mesa top is a mixture of talus slopes and vast basins without any reliable water sources. There are few routes leading below the White Rim Road to the rivers, and river water is so silty that it’s difficult to purify. Backpackers must camp in at-large zones unless traveling along the Syncline Trail where there is a designated site (See below for information on At Large Zones). A permit is required for all overnight trips (page 3).

CAMPITES AND AT-LARGE ZONES
In order to protect park resources and the exceptional experience of remoteness and solitude, the backcountry of Canyonlands is divided into sites and zones, and access to each is limited. Designated sites exist along all four-wheel-drive roads for use by four-wheel-drive/ mountain bike groups. There are also designated backcountry campsites along some heavily traveled hiking trails, mostly in the Needles District. In remote areas where travel is limited to foot or boat, visitors camp in at-large zones and may find their own low-impact campsites.

In at-large zones, backpackers may find their own campsites following Leave No Trace principles, including the regulations stated below. This is referred to as at-large camping.

These zones are for backpacking. They are NOT alternative options for vehicle camping and are NOT last-minute options when designated campsites are full. They require extensive pre-planning and the skills and knowledge to travel in remote canyon backcountry. You may contact the Backcountry Permit Office with specific questions.

Camps in at-large zones must be:
- Within the boundaries of the zone (you are responsible for knowing these boundaries),
- At least one mile from any roads,
- 1/2 mile or 1,000 vertical feet of the Green and Colorado Rivers,
- In low-impact areas like slickrock,
- NO camping activities may occur at a parked vehicle,
- 300 feet from an archeological site or historic site
- 300 feet from a water source (other than the rivers).

WHITE RIM ROAD
The 100-mile White Rim Road loops around and below the Island mesa top and provides expansive views of the surrounding area. Trips usually take two to three days by four-wheel-drive vehicle or three to four days by mountain bike. Under favorable weather conditions, the White Rim Road is considered moderately difficult for high-clearance, low range four-wheel-drive vehicles. The steep, exposed sections of the Shafer Trail, Lathrop Canyon Road, Murphy Hogback, Hardscrabble Hill, and the Mineral Bottom switchbacks make the White Rim loop a challenging mountain bike ride, and require extreme caution for both vehicles and bikes during periods of inclement weather. All vehicles and bikes must remain on roads. ATVs are not permitted.

A permit is required for all overnight trips (page 3). Bicyclists and four-wheel drivers must stay in designated campsites. Twenty individual campsites are arranged in ten camping areas. The White Rim Road is extremely popular and campsites fill early. Advance reservations are highly recommended (see page 3). No potable water is available along the White Rim Road. For mountain bike trips, a four-wheel-drive support vehicle to carry water and equipment is highly recommended. Toilets are provided at each campsite.

Climbing Regulations
Permits are not required for technical rock climbing or canyoneering unless the trip requires a four-wheel-drive bicycle day trip on the White Rim Road or Needles backcountry roads or an overnight stay in the backcountry. Climbers are encouraged to check in at district visitor centers before beginning a climb.

Technical rock climbing is prohibited in the Salt Creek Archeological District in the Needles, in Horseshoe Canyon, into any archeological site, or on any arch or natural bridge, with the exception of Washer Woman Arch at the Island.

The intentional removal of lichen or plants from rock is prohibited. The physical altering of rock faces by chiseling, glue reinforcement of existing holds, and gluing of new holds is prohibited.

The use of motorized power drills is prohibited. Slacklining is prohibited. Chalk must match the color of the rock surface.

All climbing shall be free or clean aid climbing with the following exceptions:
- No new hardware may be left in a fixed location; however, if a hardware item is unsafe, it may be replaced in kind.
- Protection may not be placed with the use of a hammer except to replace existing belay/nipple anchors and bolts on existing routes, or for emergency self-rescue.
- If an existing software item (slings, etc.) is unsafe, it may be replaced. Software that is left in place must match the rock surface in color.

Pets
Activities with pets are very limited at Canyonlands. Pets are not allowed on hiking trails or anywhere in the backcountry. Pets may not accompany groups traveling by four-wheel-drive vehicle (even if inside the vehicle); mountain bike or boat.

Pets may accompany you in the developed campgrounds, and may be walked in the park along paved roads. Pets may also accompany groups on the Potash Shafer Canyon road between Moab and the Island in the Sky. Pets must be leashed at all times when outside a vehicle.

Backcountry Trip Planner
The Needles

VISITOR SERVICES
Visitor center is open daily early March through late November from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. with extended hours spring through fall. Backcountry permits available during business hours. Water bottles can be filled at the visitor center and in the campground.

Needles Campground is open year-round. Some individual sites can be reserved in spring and fall. Other times of the year, individual sites are first-come, first-served. There are 26 sites with drinking water and flush toilets. Maximum RV length is 28 feet. Camping fees are charged year-round.

BACKPACKING
The Needles is the most popular backpacking destination in the park. Most trailheads are accessible by two-wheel-drive vehicle. Water is the limiting factor for trip length. Depending on the season and weather, water may be found in the canyons east of Chesler Park. Overnight trips require a permit which can be reserved in advance (see page 3). Designated campsites (one group per site) have been established along most trails. Groups camp at-large in areas without sites or trails.

FOUR-WHEEL-DRIVE ROADS
Over 50 miles of challenging backcountry roads access campsites, trailheads, as well as natural and cultural features. All of these roads require high-clearance, low-range four-wheel-drive vehicles. Inexperienced drivers are discouraged from attempting these roads as the risk of vehicle damage is great and towing expenses typically exceed $1,500. The roads in Horse and Lavender canyons tend to be too sandy for most mountain bikes. All vehicles and bikes must remain on designated roads. Motorcycles and vehicles must be registered, interstate legal and operated by a licensed driver. ATVs/SHVS are not permitted. Roads may close intermittently due to poor driving conditions or weather. Designated campsites (one group per site) have been established along some roads. Overnight trips require a permit which can be reserved in advance (page 4). Permits are also required for day use on Elephant Hill, Salt Creek/Horse Canyon and Lavender Canyon roads.

TRAITS
The Needles District offers over 60 miles of interconnecting trails as challenging as they are rewarding. Many different itineraries are possible, but some of the more popular ones are listed below. Conditions are primitive. Most trails traverse a mixture of slickrock benches and sandy washes. Longer trails are especially rough and require negotiating steep passes with drop-offs, narrow spots, or ladders. Water in the backcountry is unreliable and scarce in some areas. Trails are marked with cairns (small rock piles). Although most trails can be hiked in a day by strong hikers, many form loops and may be combined with other trails for longer overnight trips. A permit is required for all overnight trips. Net elevation change is generally several hundred feet or less, except for the Lower Red Lake Trail, which drops 1,400 feet to the Colorado River.

Chesler Park Loop / Joint Trail
Length: 11mi/18km round-trip
Start: Elephant Hill Trailhead
Hiking three miles along this trail brings visitors to a saddle overlooking Chesler Park, a scenic expanse of desert grasses and shrubs surrounded by colorful sandstone spires. The loop around Chesler is fairly level and winds through a series of deep, narrow fractures called the Joint Trail. Five backpacking sites. No water.

Confluence Overlook
Length: 11mi/18km round-trip
Start: Big Spring Canyon Overlook
This trail traverses mostly dry, open country along the northern edge of the geologic faults that shaped the Needles. Trail ends at a cliff overlooking the junction of the Green and Colorado rivers. There is no trail to the rivers. At-large camping only. No water.

Salt Creek Canyon
Length: 22.5mi/36km one-way
Start: Peakaboo or Cathedral Butte
The route follows the main drainage of the canyon past cottonwood groves, through thick brush. The trail is often obscured by dense vegetation. Many archeological sites and arches can be seen. Four designated campsites in upper section. Lower section is at-large camping only. Water available seasonally.

Graffiti
A Growing Problem
Even though graffiti is prohibited by law, rangers and volunteer groups spend hundreds of hours every year removing it in Canyonlands. Please join us in protecting the park by not leaving your mark. If you discover graffiti in the park, please let us know. Otherwise, make memories, take pictures, but leave no visible trace of your visit.

Wildlife
Canyonlands is bear country. Black bears wander into the park from nearby mountains, and have been spotted in the Needles, the Maze and along the Colorado River. Ravens, raccoons and squirrels will access food and trash if not stored properly. Reduce the risk of encounters with bears and other wildlife:
• Keep a clean camp and store food items securely. For the protection of wildlife and humans, it’s critical that animals do not gain access to human food.
• Never eat or store food in your tent. Store all food, garbage, or other scented items in hard sided containers when they are unattended.
• Park approved hard sided bear canisters are required when camping.
• Be alert. Watch for tracks, droppings, diggings, and other bear signs.
• Make noise: help bears avoid you.

Chesler Park.
The Maze

The Maze is the least accessible district of Canyonlands. Due to the district’s remoteness and the difficulty of roads and trails, travel to the Maze requires more time, as well as a greater degree of self-sufficiency. Rarely do visitors spend less than three days in the Maze, and the area can easily absorb a week-long trip.

The Orange Cliffs Unit of Glen Canyon National Recreation Area shares Canyonlands National Park’s western boundary and is administered under the same backcountry management plan and reservation system. The information here applies to both the Orange Cliffs Unit and the Maze District of Canyonlands.

LOCATION

The Hans Flat Ranger Station is two and one-half hours from Green River, Utah. From I-70, take Utah Highway 24 south for 24 miles. A left hand turn just beyond the turnout to Goblin Valley State Park will take you along a two-wheel-drive dirt road 46 miles (76 km) southeast to the ranger station. In addition, a four-wheel-drive route leads north from Utah Highway 95 near Hite. All two-wheel-drive roads may require four-wheel-drive or become impassable when snows, rains heavily or when areas of deep, blown sand develop.

VISITOR SERVICES

The Hans Flat Ranger Station is open year-round from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. There is a small sales area with books and maps. There are no amenities like food or gas, no entrance fees and no potable water sources in the Maze District.

HIKING & BACKPACKING

Trails in the Maze are primitive and lead into canyons and to various viewpoints. Due to the nature and depth of Maze canyons, access to them is limited. Routes into the canyons are minimally cairned from mesa top to canyon bottom, but routes through washes are often unmarked. Many of the canyons look alike and are difficult to identify without a topographic map. The Maze Overlook Trail and other routes in the district require basic climbing maneuvers in order to negotiate sections of steep slickrock and pour-offs. A 25-foot length of rope is often essential for raising or lowering packs in difficult spots. Many routes may make hikers with a fear of heights uncomfortable.

Most trailheads start from four-wheel-drive roads. Visitors with two-wheel-drive vehicles may park at the North Point Road junction, approximately 2.5 miles southeast of the Hans Flat Ranger Station, and hike 12 miles to the Maze Overlook. Depending on the vehicle, hikers may also be able to negotiate the 14 mile road to park at the top of the Flint Trail switchbacks.

PACK & SADDLE REGULATIONS

People have explored the canyons area on horseback for over a hundred years. In fact, many routes created by cowboys and shepherders have become popular four-wheel-drive roads and hiking trails. However, resource concerns, including disease transmission from stock to wild animals and the spread of exotic plant species, have necessitated special regulations for visitors wishing to ride in the park today. Lack of water is a limiting factor for pack and saddle trips in Canyonlands, as only a few areas have reliable sources.

Pack and saddle stock may be taken on all backcountry roads and in Horseshoe Canyon. Cross-country travel is prohibited. Pack and saddle stock include horses, burros or mules. Pets are prohibited in the backcountry.

Day Use

Day use permits are unlimited and free of charge, except in Horse/Salt Creek and Lavender Canyons in the Needles District, where day use is limited to seven animals per day. In these areas, permits are available at the park visitor center. In all other areas of the park, including Horseshoe Canyon, group size must not exceed ten animals and ten people.

Overnight Use

Overnight trips must stay at designated vehicle camps. Permits are required. All manure and feed must be packed out from the campsites. The group size limit is seven people and seven horses for the Needles and Island in the Sky, and five people and five horses for the Maze and Orange Cliffs. Overnight use is not allowed in Horseshoe Canyon.

For a complete list of regulations, visit www.nps.gov/cany/planyourvisit/ stockuse.htm.

Backcountry Trip Planner
Sunrise on the Colorado River in Meander Canyon.

The Colorado and Green rivers wind through the heart of Canyonlands, cutting through layers of sandstone to form two deep canyons. The calm waters of these two rivers join at the Confluence, below which their combined flow spills down Cataract Canyon with remarkable speed and power, creating a world-class stretch of white water. Flatwater trips consist of floating down either of the rivers as far as the Confluence or Spanish Bottom. There are no rapids above the Confluence in the park, making it an ideal trip for canoes, sea kayaks and other calm water boats. Below Spanish Bottom, Cataract Canyon contains fourteen miles of rapids ranging in difficulty from Class II to V: it is a particularly hazardous and isolated section of the Colorado River and should not be attempted by inexperienced boaters.

REQUIRED EQUIPMENT
All river trips must have all park required equipment listed on their permit. Visit nps.gov/cany/planyourvisit/boating.htm for a list.

PERMITS
Permits are required for all overnight river trips in Canyonlands, and for one-day Cataract and Flatwater trips (fee charged). Overnight river permits are available on Recreation.gov four months before the following seasons and up to two days before a trip start date.

April 14-October 15 (available December 14)
October 16-April 13 (available June 15)

Day use river permits are available on Recreation.gov year-round. Any permits not obtained online are available at the Backcountry Permit Office in Moab. Canyonlands does not restrict launch dates. The maximum group size is 40 people, though to preserve the wilderness character of the river the park requests groups be limited to sixteen. See page four for more information on permits. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages the rivers upstream of the park boundary on both rivers. Permits through the BLM are required for boating the Green River between Green River State Park and Mineral Bottom (Labyrinth Canyon). Permits are not required for the Colorado between Moab and the park.

LAUNCH/TAKEOUT INFORMATION
A permit for Canyonlands National Park is only for the dates of the trip below Mineral Bottom Boat Ramp on the Green River or Potash Boat Ramp on the Colorado River. The other common river launch ramps outside of the park boundaries are at Ruby Ranch or Green River State Park on the Green River; both charge a small fee for launches. There is no vehicle access to the rivers near the Confluence or Cataract Canyon. Groups wishing to avoid the whitewater must travel upstream. Unless groups have their own motors or a lot of time to paddle, upstream travel is via jet boat shuttle back to Potash.

A reservation for a jet boat shuttle must be made prior to obtaining a permit for the park (shuttles are limited, while there is currently no limit to the number of flatwater permits). The two companies authorized to operate in the park are: Tex’s Riverways and Canyonlands By Night and Day. The takeout for Cataract Canyon trips is usually North Wash (Dirty Devil) Boat Ramp on Lake Powell, which can be up to 30 miles from the last rapid. Conditions on Lake Powell vary widely, visit www.nps.gov/cany/planyourvisit/lakepowell.htm to learn more.

CAMPING
There are no designated campsites along the rivers in Canyonlands. During periods of high water, camps can be difficult to find, especially ideal camps. Campsites are first come, first serve. However, on the east bank of the Colorado below the confluence (mile 214.3) there is a sign warning of rapids ahead. At the base of the sign is a campsite registration box. Groups camping below the confluence are urged to indicate which campsites they intend to use so that other boaters may plan their stops in advance. This applies to both flatwater groups meeting their jet-boat shuttle as well as groups continuing down Cataract Canyon. This system is simply a courtesy to others and does not guarantee a campsite. Please do not sign up groups other than your own. Contact the Backcountry Permit Office for a park-maintained campsite list.

FISHING
Fishing is not a popular activity in Canyonlands. The muddy waters of the Green and Colorado Rivers contain mostly carp, catfish, sand shiners, red shiners and fathead minnows. Visitors must have a valid Utah State fishing license and must comply with all state fishing regulations. Small populations of endangered native fish exist in the park, including Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, humpback and bonytail chub. Due to resource development, competition with non-native species and other factors, native populations have declined and are struggling to survive in the Upper Colorado River Basin. Visitors should become familiar with the above fish and the proper techniques for releasing them unharmed.

River Distances & Float Times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Launch Location</th>
<th>Launch Fee</th>
<th>Miles to Confluence</th>
<th>Days*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colorado River</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moab</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>3 to 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potash</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green River</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green River State Park</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>6 to 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal Geyser</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>6 to 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby Ranch</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>5 to 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mineral Bottom</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3 to 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cataract Canyon</td>
<td>Confluence to Hite</td>
<td>45 miles</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Launch fees are not charged or collected by the National Park Service. *Estimated times. Actual float times will vary with river conditions.

Have a Safe Visit
Every year, rangers respond to dozens of search & rescue incidents in the park. For your own safety, please keep the following in mind throughout your visit:

- Carry and drink water. Even a short stroll will make you thirsty on a 90°F (32°C) day. One gallon (4 liters) per person per day is recommended for longer hikes.
- Wear sturdy shoes with adequate traction. Many trails cross uneven terrain and follow rock ledges that are slippery when wet or snow covered. It is also much easier to go up than down.
- Always tell someone where you’re going and when you expect to return. If you become lost, remain where you are; finding you more difficult.
- Severe lightning occurs here. Return to your vehicle if possible. Stay away from open areas, high spots or trees. If your skin tingles or hair stands on end, crouch down and place both feet together firmly on the ground.

Packrafts
Does your backpacking trip involve a float down one of the rivers? Groups using portable, inflatable boats to navigate sections of the Colorado or Green rivers must carry the following items:

- A rigid, durable, metal fire pan that is large enough to fully contain all fire ash and debris.
- Approve toilet system: commercial bag systems (e.g. Wag Bag, Restop II) stored in hard-sided containers or heavy-duty, waterproof bags labeled “Human Waste.”
- One approved, serviceable type I, III, or V personal flotation device (PFD) for each trip participant.
- Repair kit.
- An air pump or bag for inflation of raft.
- A bailing device.
- A first aid kit.

A permit is required in park; nights spent outside of the river corridor (1/2 mile or 1,000 vertical feet from the river) must be in designated campsites or zones. These nights can be selected during the reservation process on Recreation.gov under backcountry overnight permits.