



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Grand Canyon National Park

PO Box 129
Grand Canyon, AZ 86023

928 638-7779 phone
928 638-7609 fax
www.nps.gov/grca

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Contact(s): Shannan Marcak
Phone number: 928-638-7958
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Grand Canyon National Park's River Orientation Video: Much More Than an Orientation

Grand Canyon, AZ – If the thought of watching a National Park Service orientation video leaves you less than enthusiastic, then you haven't watched the Grand Canyon River Orientation Video. Although it is full of much-needed information and helpful hints, it is also brimming with spectacular scenery and is truly enjoyable to watch.

Instead of feeling as though they've spent 30 minutes listening to National Park Service rules and regulations, viewers of the River Orientation Video come away feeling as though they've been entertained. Yet, when questioned, it is clear that they've also learned a great deal about how to prepare for and safely enjoy a river trip through the Grand Canyon.

According to Michael McGinnis, River District Ranger in Grand Canyon National Park, the fact that the video is actually a production people will want to see is "not unintentional"; and park personnel have had "really good feedback on it" since its release. The video has also received good reviews from industry professionals who recently awarded a bronze Telly Award to Round House Productions, the contractor that produced the video, for its work on the project.

A production that achieves the goals of educating and disseminating information while still entertaining doesn't happen over night. The first attempts to fund a new orientation video started back in 2000 when it was recognized that the previous orientation was out of date, and more importantly, wasn't fully serving the needs of its audience.

Visitors needed to have knowledge of basic gear requirements and information on what to expect before they arrived —while they were getting ready for their trips. Unfortunately, they weren't seeing the old presentation until they arrived at Lee's Ferry on the day they launched. The new orientation has been made available on DVD; and now, a copy is sent to each person who acquires a permit to lead a private river trip through the Grand Canyon. Today, visitors get the basics before they arrive, allowing rangers to provide more meaningful, in-depth orientations to groups at the launch site.

Actual work on production of the video began in 2005. Since the previous presentation still had a lot to offer, the National Park Service chose to derive their new script from the old orientation; then, they included updated information. The spectacular scenery in the video intentionally

reflects portions of the river that visitors actually see and experience on a Grand Canyon river trip. Much of the footage was captured during river patrols conducted by park rangers, including footage of encounters with commercial raft trips incorporated to exhibit appropriate procedures and techniques.

Almost seven years after the first steps toward a new presentation were taken, the Grand Canyon River Orientation Video was finally unveiled for the 2007 river season. According to Lee's Ferry Sub-District Ranger David Chapman, "since its release, the new video has had some very positive impacts. Not only has it saved rangers time", decreasing launch orientation time from one-and-one-half or even two hours to about 30 minutes, "but it's good for the visitors, too, because they get a lot of their questions answered before they actually get here."

Once a permit holder receives a copy of the DVD, it is required that every member of the trip watch it before their launch date. To facilitate this requirement, even when a trip's members are spread all over the country, the video has been made available on Grand Canyon National Park's official web site at www.nps.gov/grca/photosmultimedia/riv-or01.htm. Now, trip members who need to view the orientation AND people who are interested in making a trip but want to learn more before making a decision can access the video from their home computers.

By the way, if you are wondering what happens to the DVD once everyone has watched it, the permit holder gets to keep it—a souvenir. It provides an opportunity to show friends what it was like to take a river trip through the Grand Canyon. It also serves as a tool to provide early orientation to the next group if a permittee chooses to lead another trip someday. Perhaps most importantly, the DVD is a tangible reminder of what it takes to safely enjoy and care for a river as well loved as the Colorado.

For more information on taking a river trip through the Grand Canyon, visit our web site at www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/whitewater-rafting.htm or call Grand Canyon National Park's river information line at 928-638-7884.

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