

Salt Creek Canyon, Canyonlands, Utah, May 2010



One week after the fact, at the tail-end of the weekend, I'm sitting down to write about our 2010 southern Utah trip. A pilgrimage to southern Utah has become an annual thing for us, this year being the third year in a row. But we nearly didn't make it out of town this year, due to a very busy end-of-the-semester, tight finances, and the kids' school. The tipping point was when we told the kids we weren't going and then they lobbied us for the trip. Nagging in the back of my mind was also the thought that opportunities for such adventure come rarely, and that our years with the kids truly are numbered.

I had made the plans for the trip back in January, picking out the week following UM's graduation, and reserving backcountry camp sites in Canyonlands' Salt Creek Canyon. The itinerary would take us from the south end of Salt Creek Canyon to the Needles' District visitor center—some 28 miles over five days.

The ambitious nature of the trip was not lost on me—I did my share of worrying—but the kids proved to be up to the challenge. Our itinerary was 4, 5, 7, 7, and 5 miles, and they walked strong and without complaint each day.

The country through which the hike took us was unceasingly spectacular, and there were many pleasant surprises along the way, including many cliff dwellings from Native Americans of two periods: 1000 and 4-5000 years ago. These peoples planted crops of corn, and though the living was hard, they must have drawn spiritual strength from the amazing land in which they lived. One of the things that struck me most from the trip was the many pictographs that we saw, some decorative, others haunting. I still wonder about the human beings that made them.

Some other highlights were: ample water, slot canyons and mesas to explore each night, a swimming hole on the second day, Indian ruins, uncountable lizards, two bear, a scorpion, great camp sites, watching the kids trudge along with pack on their backs—the list goes on.

This was our best trip yet to the Canyon country, which is saying a lot given our trips during the last two years. This was also the second time we've gone in May, when the temps are in the 80's and the wildflowers are blooming. But really it was Salt Creek Canyon and the fact that we were up to the challenge of hiking its length together that made the trip great.

And finally, a major logistical issue with hiking the length of Salt Creek Canyon is getting back to your car at the trailhead. Fortunately (or not), I have been biking my tail off this spring and so felt up to the challenge of riding my mountain bike the 36 miles,

and approximately 2,000 feet of elevation gain, back to the car. Worries of a dead battery in the middle of nowhere when I arrived exhausted at the car had plagued me throughout the hike, but I made it to the car three hours after starting out, and she started up no problem.

This trip was a wonderful one. I'd highly recommend it, though I'd also say that it's not for the faint of heart. Point-to-point hikes are committing and dealing with the car shuttle was a pain. But for all of us gluttons for punishment, I can't think of a better trip to take two fit 10 and 13 year old kids on. And it's neat to see that the kids share our passion for southern Utah and the Canyon country.



Ellie with pictographs at Peekaboo Camp; Me with handprints left by long ago canyon residents.



Cooking (left) and our loaded packs (right).



Away from the cares of the world.



Starting out.