

Dear Family and Friends,

Christmas 2015

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from our new home in Northern Nevada. We are now living in Carson City, Nevada's state capital, located at the foot of the beautiful Sierra Nevada Mountains. We are really enjoying our new surroundings and find this a great place to live!

2015 has been an eventful year for our family, dominated by two "grand" adventures - relocating to our new home and an awe-inspiring river trip through the Grand Canyon. So grab a cup of hot cider and a comfy chair and join us for a whirlwind tour of our family's past twelve months.

In February of last year Bob was awarded a permit in the National Park Services lottery system for a private trip down the Grand Canyon. Landing one of these permits is so rare that when Bob got the e-mail he thought that someone was playing a joke on him. Once he got over the shock he was excited and also a bit trepidatious. He knew how much work was involved in putting a trip of this sort together.



Our Family in Grand Canyon National Park

So our adventure began - a year of planning and sending out e-mail's to see who could go; buying gear; filling out paperwork and paying fees; and buying more gear (REI loved us!). A lot of preparation was involved as we would be camping for three weeks while navigating some of the biggest rapids in the world. I was excited that God provided this trip at the perfect moment in our family's history. Hannah would be fourteen years old and Caleb would be eleven. If the permit had come a couple of years earlier our kids would have been too young to go. Twelve of our good friends from Nevada, Montana, and even New Zealand signed on for the trip. Each person was assigned specific tasks to perform. Jobs ranged from boatman, to trip doctor, to head cook, and even sanitation engineer (setting up and taking down the toilet system every day was really important as "nothing" could be left behind!). Hannah was designated trip photographer, Bob was our trip leader and family's boatman, Caleb was our expert pack hauler and can crusher, and I was in charge of the food.



Our Group at Deer Creek Falls

At the same time we were also preparing for our other "grand" adventure - buying a house and moving to Carson City. Our garage was filled with stacks of boxes and gear bags. On one side was gear for our trip to the canyon and on the other were boxes for our move to Carson City. I felt like I was back in the military during my stint as mobility officer - so much stuff!

On April 11th about half of our group met in Flagstaff, Arizona to coordinate with Professional River Outfitters (PRO), the company we were working with to rent gear and shuttle us to and from the river. The next day we journeyed about 130 miles north to Lee's Ferry to meet the rest of the group and prepare for the launch. It was quite a sight watching PRO unload all the gear and food we would be



Boats on the River



Emerald Camp

taking with us on our trip. The first thing we had to do was inflate the five, 18 foot rafts we would be using to carry us and everything else needed on the trip. Then came the rowing frames, food boxes, crates, coolers, and gear. Once that was done, everything had to be covered and strapped down, because if the boat flips you don't want to lose your stuff to the river!

The next morning, after the mandatory safety briefing from the Park Service, we pushed off on our much anticipated adventure. Orange cliffs rose before us as we drifted down the emerald green waters serenaded by the sweet call of canyon wrens. We were finally on our way for 21 days of camping, hiking, rapids, and, of course, a lot of "fun work". We

had to stay on schedule so each day we focused on getting to the next camp, where we had to work together like a bunch of ants to move everything back off the boats to set up camp, spend the night and then break it all down again, reload it, and do it all over again.

This routine began every afternoon once we reached camp by selecting a spot for the kitchen, (hopefully out of the blowing sand), and a place for our nightly ring of chairs around the fire. Once that was complete, everyone spread out to find their own personal space somewhere near. Dinner was prepared by the designated kitchen crew, tents were set up and personal needs attended to. Bathing was interesting. You would think with the river at our feet keeping clean would not be a problem, but the Colorado's average temperature is a chilly 46 degrees (due to the fact that water for power generation is drawn from the bottom of Lake Powell) and that doesn't encourage cleanliness. Thankfully our friends from Montana, the Kelsey's, kindly brought along their back country shower with battery powered pump. Every night an out-of-the-way showering spot was chosen and buckets of water were heated over the fire. Caleb was a

bit perturbed by such "exposed" bathing conditions, but with Dad's help he grew to enjoy it. The group also enjoyed a fun bathing option on hot days - the "polar bear plunge". Attired in swim suits we would bravely run into the river and, gasping for air, quickly wash, and get back out again.



The Kids Taking the Plunge

The upper section of the Grand Canyon tends to be more open with not as many big rapids. Though there are many beautiful spots in this section of the canyon, the one that stood out for us was the turquoise blue waters of the Little Colorado River as it flows into the main Colorado. The water is this amazing color because of all the minerals and salts in the area. Hannah described it this way in her journal: "The color of it was something rarely expected of a crayon, let alone real, natural water". This was my favorite stop on the trip and I thoroughly enjoyed the few hours we spent playing in the warm, magical waters.

Phantom Ranch marked the mid-point of our trip, and after a quick stop we put on our spray suits because this is where a really big series of rapids begin. Rapids form when rocks and debris from either a tributary or landfall dam the



Hannah in Havasu Creek

river. The water backs up then cascades over the dam and a rapid is formed. Some of these are small, and some are really big. Navigating them, especially the big ones, requires planning and skill on the part of the boatman. Picking a line through the rapid and setting up just right before going into it are what keep the passengers and gear out of harm's way.

We had already run a number of big rapids before Phantom, including House Rock rapid, which helped prepared us for all those to come. As with all the big rapids, we stopped above, got out and "scouted" it to find the best route/line through it. Sometimes it's safer for passengers to walk around the rapid and get picked up below. Bob decided that our family was a team and all of us should enjoy the ride. This being the first big rapid, we nervously put on our spray suits and held on. After an exciting ride through



Our Family Running House Rock Rapid

the wild water of House Rock Rapid we emerged soaked and exhilarated. Now each morning's discussion was filled with talk of what rapids we had to look forward to that day. Rapids with names like Sockdolager, Hance, Granite, Hermit, Horn, Crystal, Upset, Bedrock, Lava and so many more filled our conversations and added excitement to our days. Of these, the largest is Lava Falls Rapid located 180 miles downstream of Lee's Ferry. Many a boat has flipped in Lava - swallowing them whole in its giant maw! (Hannah reading Moby Dick on this trip is affecting my writing!)



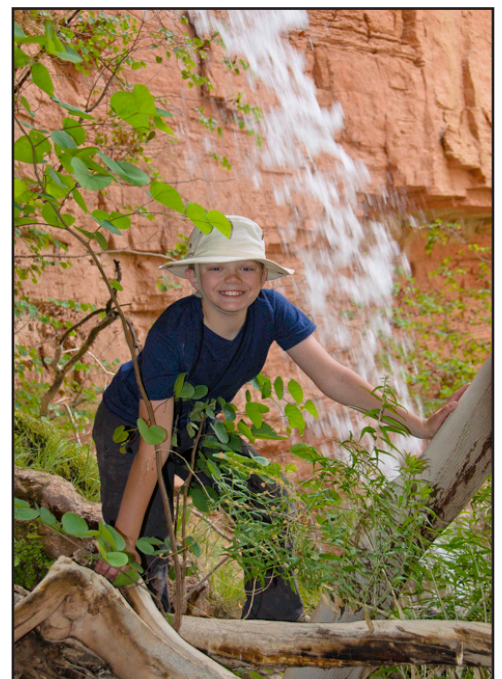
A Wild Ride Through Upset Rapid

equally awe-inspiring. One of Hannah and Bob's favorites was their hike to Thunder River. This was a fairly strenuous, eight mile hike in the beautiful Tapeats creek drainage where the world's shortest river gushes out of the red cliff face in a sparkling cascade of white water into Tapeats Creek. It was great for father and daughter to have this special experience together.

Of course, there were many times when fear bubbled to the surface, but facing them was one of the greatest gifts this adventure gave to each of us. For example, when we were preparing for this trip I kept telling Caleb - "you've done this trip before", referring to the fact that my first trip rafting down the Grand Canyon was when I was pregnant with him. I wanted to encourage him by helping him understand that he did it once and he could do it again.

River raft trips are an amazing combination of awesome elements. You have the excitement of the river in its raw wildness, the camaraderie of your boatmates around the fire at night, and the river to carry everything, including the kitchen sink, all in an intimate wilderness setting. No wonder people go back again and again to experience that relaxed mental mode that rafters refer to as "river time".

Safely navigating Lava and the dozens of other world class rapids was great, but there were many side hikes that were



Caleb at Deer Creek Springs

Our second "grand" adventure of the year has been our move to Carson City. We have been blessed with a lovely house that really feels like "home". As I look out of the window, there is a fresh layer of snow frosting the mountains, wild quail run in and out of the yard, and I can hear the sound of our kids playing in the family room. At night you can see millions of stars shining brightly above, with the sound of yipping coyotes in the distant sagebrush. The people are friendly and Home Depot, Trader Joe's, and



Our New Carson Valley Home

Costco are just down the road. God has given us a great church just up the hill that

feels like a big family. And, Lake Tahoe is just 20 minutes away!

The kids are adjusting to their new schools and getting straight A's. Hannah is now in the 9th grade and attends Douglas High School where she is a journalist on the yearbook staff. On Sundays she helps with the preschool class at church. Caleb is in 6th grade at the Carson Valley Middle School and was already awarded citizen of the month. He enjoys building complex machines from Legos and riding his new mountain bike. Bob's job is going great and he regularly works with top leadership in the state. He has been appointed to a couple of national boards and is a sought after public speaker ("Cowboy Bob" still can't believe that!). I recently received my substitute teacher's license and am teaching sewing classes for the local homeschoolers group.



Lisa on the Flume Trail above Lake Tahoe

We have only begun to explore the multitude of

outdoor activities that are available around here and have really enjoyed those we've done. Topping the list include mountain biking the famous "Flume Trail" high above the iridescent blue waters of Lake Tahoe and a hike to the summit of Mt. Rose. We all got new snowshoes for Christmas and I am looking forward to trying them out. If I would give this place a rating on the Grand Canyon river rating scale it would be a 10+! We thank God for all our many blessings in this special year, for Jesus who is always with us, and for you!



Celebrating 25 Years of Adventure Together

Always your friends,

Bob, Lisa, Hannah and Caleb Potts

Check out our Grand Canyon Trip and other adventures on our website: www.pottsadventures.com