

Grand Canyon hike 9/04/11 by A.Wulffe

Hi friends, thought maybe you might want to hear how I've progressed from Maniac Marathoner to Hellbent Hiker! On an off chance remark between my buddy Annette Tomal and I during a hot, humid evening run in the woods around the Danada Horse Farm, I discovered Annette's son was going on a cross country summer road trip. She had a few days free around Labor Day and mentioned she might join him on his Grand Canyon hike. My ears pricked up as I had some free flights leftover that I had to use up by that weekend from my manic marathon travel. Larry and I had originally planned to go to Newport RI and hike and see sites I had missed when there for the marathon. The one I had run during my first and only nor'easter! Larry agreed the Grand Canyon sounded great and little did we know how smart our change of locale was with the latest hurricane bearing down a mere week before our trip. Any way here is a brief report.

We flew out Saturday morning to Phoenix and took our own rental to Grand Canyon, Annette wanted her own so she could go straight to the canyon and spend more time with her son. We stopped at some interesting places enroute and got in mid evening. On our way to WalMart for a pair of cheap trekking poles, Annette calls to mention she forgot her shoes and what did I think about her hiking in Teva sandals? She asked me if I could buy her a pair of shoes from WalMart! More on those later. Larry and I had done extensive reading on our hike. While Larry read normal guidebooks with fabulous photographs I was buried in "Over the Edge: Death in the Grand Canyon" and Ranger Confidential. I was sufficiently scared to realize what we were planning might be a bit tougher than a stroll in the neighborhood. We both were lucky to have rooms on the rim, we at Maswik and the Tomals at Yavapai. The lodge properties are huge and sprawling but they have one thing in common. Old and no air if you go cheap! A quick dinner, a shoe drop, and then back to lay out our gear. We both used backpacks and had plenty of food in the form of power bars, pretzels, beef jerky, pb and j sandwiches, candy, fruit and water. Gallons of water. Three of us used hydration systems and Larry had a dozen or more bottles. Of course he may have forgotten pack in pack out rule! Trekking poles, hats, sunglasses, cameras, extra clothes, ponchos and more. I was distressed to find my pack suddenly was heavy, but Larry's had to weigh 50 plus pounds. More later on what he had in his pack. We got up at 4 am, and we're at the Hiker's Express bus stop for the 5:10 am pick up. Lots of young European kids hiking. Three stops later Annette and Justin jumped on. We decided to descend via South Kaibab trailhead. While this is the steeper route down, we figured we would get down quickly then be able to ascend before it got really hot. The trail was steep, and we slid, A LOT! It was freaky to slide or hear the person behind you skidding and know the edge 5000 plus feet down was only a few feet away. It was still not sunrise, though not pitch black and we were passed by many other hikers. Most young and all fast. Larry decided he needed a staff too and improvised using a cactus bloom stem probably 12 feet long. He cracked it in half and shaved off the dozens of small hard spines and it was perfect. Soon Justin announced he thought he'd like to go ahead a bit faster and meet us later at the top. About halfway down we meet a Park Service Ranger lounging nonchalantly against the canyon wall, he casually asked our plans. We admitted to our plan of coming up the same day and he advised we rest at the bottom till very late in the afternoon when the heat of the day would be less. I asked if that would mean we'd be going up in the dark. He said yes but as they were already treating lots of hikers for heat exhaustion that it would be a good idea. I sorta liked the idea of seeing the canyon at night, well seeing is not exactly the right word, but we had flashlights and headlamps. Annette preferred to go up after a short rest, so we agreed to stay together. It took over three hours to get down to the river. Once there we immediately did our version of an ice bath, knowing later we would not regret it. Less than an hour later we were ready to start for the rim. We were doing ok with heat and had some sections of shade from big clouds slowly passing the sun. This time we would be going up the Bright Angel Trail. Bright Angel is a couple miles longer because of the almost constant switchbacks but would be easier in the long run than South Kaibab. Maybe it was us but even though the temps were about 120 in the canyon we moved slow enough and did not feel too horrible. I had read it was a good idea to drench your clothing and

did so at the bottom, then again at every little creek crossing we came upon in the early miles. The hike up seemed so slow. Unlike a marathon where we get the reassurance that we are indeed progressing via the visuals from the mile markers, there were no such markers here. We also had the added two miles longer on this trail and our first hour or more seemed to follow the river with very little uphill progress. For the next 4.8 miles we would be without any rest stop areas so we had to make sure our water supply would be adequate. For me this was hard as I liked the fact my load had been getting a bit lighter now it would be heavy again. Any guess on how much a gallon of water weighs? I know! Our first stop was called Indian Gardens, and it was hard to believe anywhere in the canyon could be so lush and green and peaceful. There were enclosed pit toilets, a pump, many wooden benches and a lot of hikers resting and chatting. Annette and I both used the benches for one more leg drain and I ate another pb&j while lying down, only to have one pesky little squirrel inches from my face on the back of the bench hoping for that sandwich. On my way back down the steps, (why every one of the pit toilets had to be slightly off the trail and accessed from steps is still beyond me), a fellow hiker called out that a squirrel had gotten into my backpack. Larry shooed him off. Annette said she was feeling GREAT and anxious to go and maybe get up a bit quicker. Justin surely was close to the rim if not already there and she hoped to spend more time with him. We parted and soon Larry and I took off. About twenty minutes down the road, sick of drinking Gatorade, I took a sip from my Platypus hose and realized the mouthpiece was GONE! Larry looked closer and found teeth marks, seemed Mr. Squirrel retaliated for my not sharing lunch. I was only inconvenienced as I still had the water but accessing it now would mean stopping, removing the backpack, pulling the bladder out of the inner backpack sleeve, and carefully pouring out some into another bottle then repeating all the above to put it away. I sorely hoped I would not get too thirsty. Our next stop was at Three Mile Rest House. The name implied that we would then be three miles from the rim. We both felt pretty good and got there in reasonable time but were still surprised to see Annette at the water pump. She smiled broadly and called out "Guess who's here?" Yup Justin. He admitted to being there for two hours resting as he was really fatigued, but he had also spent two hours at Indian Gardens resting prior and had pushed himself to climb the last 1.5 miles to get to this rest stop. We encouraged him that he'd be able to finish if he went slow and about 50 feet up the trail it became very obvious he could not! As luck would have it a volunteer Park Ranger came upon us and did a quick assessment of Justin. He incorrectly determined it was most likely hyponatremia (too much water so your electrolytes are out of whack). Justin tried again to hike up but this too proved futile and he faced spending the night. The Ranger said many hikers have to and pointed down at the ground where Justin could make his bed! Larry, the Eagle Scout then proceeds to pull out of his monster mega pack and unbelievable amount of goodies. A mylar sheet, a disposable poncho, a half zip hooded poncho, a head lamp, a flash light, spare batteries, a walkie talkie, a white bed sheet, rope!!!! And a deck of cards????? Annette and I added food, water, phone and he was supplied for what might be a long night. We felt weird leaving him but decided it was probably our best option. We made him promise not to fall off the edge and not to hike out in the middle of night if he woke up disorientated. He kept both promises somewhat. We now had 30 plus minutes to dark and got out our headlamps and flashlights as we were unsure if it would get dark fast the minute the sun set behind those rocks. As luck would have it, it had been a bit cloudy one and off all day but it never did get pitch black. We made it to our last rest stop 1.5 miles up and got water and prepared to continue to the rim. It was easy to see though my professional coal-mining headlamp wore out it's batteries and I switched to a little cheapo model that I had used during our 36 hour 195 mile relay adventure in TN last November. It gave nowhere near the light I had been used to. That fact and my fatigue now led me to slow way way down. Poor Annette and Larry I am sure they were anxious to get ahead but my aching hip joints would not allow it. Less than a half a mile to the trail head some hikers overtook us and mentioned they had seen Justin and he looked good. They had also seen at least 6 other hikers that were spending the night unexpectedly and we were reassured. A few minutes later and almost at the trail head, my phone rang, it was Justin saying he was going to try to get to the rim. Annette and I decided to wait for him at one tricky intersection where he could possibly go the wrong way and Larry went off to order pizza. The plan was to meet on the porch of El Tovar, a

famous NP Hotel and re hydrate. About 30 minutes later Justin steams into view looking good and we walk another 10 minutes trying to find the trailhead for a finish picture. Next off to the El Tovar where we sit on the porch and order drinks waiting for Larry. Justin then mentions he thinks he needs medical help as he is having chest pains!!! The GC has a great system in order, first the hotel mgr calls the rangers they assess Justin, then call the EMT, an ambulance arrives and he gets an EKG in the main common area of the lodge, it is about 10 pm and not many folks around. They also tell us they can do blood work in route to the hospital in Flagstaff as his EKG is abnormal. Wow hard to believe it is the young athletic guy having problems and not one of us, but the signs all over the canyon show a picture of a Justin like hiker and tell us these are the ones that normally need rescue!!!! Annette rushes back to her room to change and repack two cars. Her rental needs to go back to Phoenix and somehow Justin's car needs to get somewhere. We work out logistics as the night and day progress. At three am I call to find that Justin is still in ER they are jammed with patients he had to take 3 ambulances due to regulations and had only been preliminarily assessed. Annette also had struck a deer while driving through the highway portion that cuts through a National Forest and really damaged the rental. She was okay. At 6 am we decide we'll drive our rental and Justin's to Flagstaff hospital and then the three of us will go to Phoenix. Annette is pretty sure Justin will be leaving soon but he is still in ER. Doctor now orders angiogram and we get the bad news. Seems there is a structural abnormality in his heart, an artery is attaching to one of the chambers in the wrong spot and blood supply is inadequate. The doctor explains that even though Justin is a wrestler and ran a half marathon he has never put his body through such prolonged strain as he did that Sunday. Larry and I have some time on Monday to get breakfast and look around the rim but decide to forego our other sightseeing plans in order to get to Flagstaff. Here we will take the damaged rental back to the airport. Annette has decided to stay with her son as it is unclear when he'll be released. Foolishly I did not double-check our departure time nor did Larry and after meeting Annette in the ER and tying up a bunch of loose ends, we leave in two cars for Phoenix. Traffic outside Flagstaff is ungodly slow, and then we hit a hard thunderstorm. The cheap Payless deer damaged rental shakes like crazy over 70 and the hood is loose as well as a light is damaged in front. Another huge traffic tie up outside Phoenix and we know that with getting gas for our rental time is up for making the last flight home to Chicago. Our oldest son had stayed til midday on Monday but now we would have two boys home alone for the night, the 15 year old sick as a dog with an upper respiratory infection, so young Mike 10 years old was on his own for getting off to school Tuesday! To see us in the rental lot at Annette's car company must have been comical. As we were anxious to dump the car that is basically what we did. Larry parked it in a stall jumped into mine and when the guys yelled for a signature we said call the renter and off we speed to Avis. We figured it was a waste of time to try to explain all the details and Annette had called in to report the accident the day before. You should have seen the guys staring at the car with the deer guts still smeared along the side and at us! I had called Southwest from the highway and they said if we at least came to the counter within two hours of our flight and told them we were missing it we could get out the next morning at 6 am. This we did only Larry was flying on free ticket and was guaranteed a seat at 6 but as I was on a reduced fare I'd have to come early and see if I could go standby. Dinner at Chili's and as it was too late to find a hotel with a shuttle to and from PDX especially a 24 hour shuttle we decided to rough it in the airport. First time for us and the couches were cheap, thin, hard, wicker style, we only could score chairs guess the regulars got the couches. I did not sleep at all and at two am gave up and ordered a coffee and bagel. At 4 am we went down to the ticket counter for a gate pass and for Larry to get a boarding pass. We had a super friendly SW agent who politely asked us why we missed, not sure what she thought of our story but she got me a seat and up we went to sit for 6 more hours until our arrival at Midway. I'm still tired I think. All in all the Canyon was beyond majestic and we were thrilled to achieve our goal and be part of such a magnificent part of our country. Justin and his mom drove 25 hours home to Wheaton making sure they stayed each night at a city with a big hospital. He will seek treatment with a big hospital in the city soon.

Sorry so long, for my running friends I just heard that the Rave Run picture in September Runner's World is of South Kaibab Trail. That I have to see! Next up for me some close to home trail runs marathon distance.

A few pictures on last page.....scroll down please I think they are pretty good!



Larry was taking all the photos



Nowhere close to bottom yet



Almost seems like the little rock is holding up this monster. A few creeks near bottom



Off to right rear are the switchbacks we would follow for hours weaving our way down then up again!

Did I mention this stupid squirrel at Indian Gardens ate the tip off my Platypus making it useless to suck from while hiking? Maybe I should use my CC insurance plan! Anyway while lying on the bench

and doing the leg drain I noticed the little rodent on the back of the seat inches from my face while eating my PBJ I kept shooing him away when I got up to say goodbye to my friend as she was going on ahead to the rim another hiker asked if that was my backpack on the bench as a squirrel was in my food. Well that's not all he was into; now to see if I can buy a replacement which I m sure they do sell.

I've been thinking I should share these tips. Maybe you know them but I sure did not.

- never rent a car from a really cheap co w/o checking a couple things. Because my friend choose Payless simply because it was cheap two things happened after she hit the deer enroute to Flagstaff hospital: one her car was junk to begin with and shimmied like mad over 70 mph. Two she was not allowed no matter how much she could pay to drop it off at any other location i.e. Flagstaff or Grand Canyon airport. Her option had she been alone and not had us to ferry two cars back to Phoenix was to leave it somewhere and pay the TOWING bill. Her car was drivable but logistics would have meant she had to leave a drivable car so she could attend to son in hospital.
- there are different electrolyte formulas; was told this by two Xanterra employees gals my age one was the gift shop mgr at the Hoyt Gallery on the rim, her boyfriend was a Grand Canyon EMT. High altitude formula electrolyte formula is much preferred to use in the grand canyon
- check what your credit card ins will cover in Annette's case if she supplies copious amounts of paperwork her United Visa will pay for all the rental car damage and bill! Diana I know you know this but Diane Bolton and I had not or forgotten.
- ranger EMT who first helped Justin inside El Tovar lodge said we don t need to rely so heavily on manufactured products: best bet to carry down the canyon are BANANAS, Beef Jerky and Pretzels (simple carbs and salt). Larry and I had all three and ate them though I did use 1 electrolyte pill like the one you gave me in the Gravely Range and I did take two succeed tabs from my husband.

Further reflections by Annette as written from the airport in the middle of the night:

re facts in my report: I wish I could give you the details better and landmarks but I was so worried skidding down the SK trail I dared not take my camera out, put my readers on and then try to focus and take pictures. Think I took 6 and deleted most for being out of focus. The brooks trail runners were useless on the pitch of that trail and one trekking pole is not enough. Annette and I had run together 10 states and she is good buddy and I could not not share a pole with her. Oh say no please to the Miss Larry backpack hoarder likeness seriously you too have all that stuff. I could not wait to toss half my stuff in trash at El Tovar. I packed only what I I I I I needed and nothing for anyone else. Yes call it selfish, but I was thinking if I was so heavy and fatigued at mile 3 or 4 I'd have to turn around and go home and I wanted that finish. My friend and her son packed even much lighter; their major food sources were bars, gu s and electrolyte tabs. I had p b and j sandwiches, bananas pretzels bars some weird MT Huckelberry hammer gel 🍌🍌🍌 and a poncho headlamp and flashlight not much else but Platypus and spare bottles. I wore my new hat not as cool as your Tilley's but a neat color that matched my shorts, and my favorite long sleeve shirt which was soaked in the CO river many many times and put on freezing cold wet I think it helped a lot.

Our first hotel was Red Feather. Saw it on the way out of town. Yes totally agree staying on the rim. Maswik was next to El Tovar and was a Godsend. We were in older portion with no air but being able to get back Sunday night and shower and sleep and then get up and spend a couple hours walking around was great. We messed up big time on Monday: I stupidly didn't have the time needed to successfully get on our flight. I felt obligated to help Annette out as much as possible she was so unnerved and could not even think or speak straight at one point I offered to stay with her son and let her go home she was a basket case, which was scary to me as she has traveled the world alone, lots

of primitive places, dealt with her first son and his inoperable brain tumor, co work a book with her husband detailing that time appeared on the Gayle King (Orca's girl friend) and much more, but the exhaustion, body and mind stress of the day was a lot for her. I just got an update from Annette: she and Justin are driving home, just went through a bad rain storm and almost hit by the semi that jackknifed in front of them on the interstate in NM. This was 8 30 pm and I told her to get off the damn roads and into a cozy bed and rest up. Doubt they will though

The Canyon was really beyond my wildest imagination, and to think it did not do us in, we really were lucky. I know I prepared and asked you and others for all kinds of tips but so much can go wrong out there so fast. I think we took 15 hours but I was pretty proud of us. My hips are burning, my inner thigh all the way down to knee is so sore I have to lift my fat thigh to uncross my legs which was pretty creepy looking while I was seated with a rather chatty architect on the flight home. I had a C boarding pass and boarded maybe 10th to last and this guy asks me to sit with him laughingly telling me I had the right body type. We had to laugh as I said I know exactly what you are doing I do it all the time too! Larry had a free ticket so last night the SW agent automatically booked him on the 6 am but told me flight was full and I could go standby as I had a discounted fare. This scared me so I went downstairs to get a gate pass as soon as the counter opened at 4 20 am. Larry and I got to the counter and the gal was so nice and said she had me confirmed in a seat so that spared us a lot of stress having a car at airport. So tired now I am barely keeping my eyes open.

I loved the hike up Bright Angel it seemed I was able to stop more often and just LOOK. The altitude did not seem at all problematic but I did get really really tired after the mile 3 rest house.

Learned from two cool gals in the Hoyt Gallerie on the Rim that there is a high desert formulation of electrolyte drink. Also emt rangers say you are much better off with beef jerky bananas and pretzels than all the manufactured stuff like gels electrolyte pills and salt tablets I had two bananas pretzels and Larry gave Justin our jerky good thing we did not need it

I was still impressed by how quickly the hikers were able to move downhill so quickly.