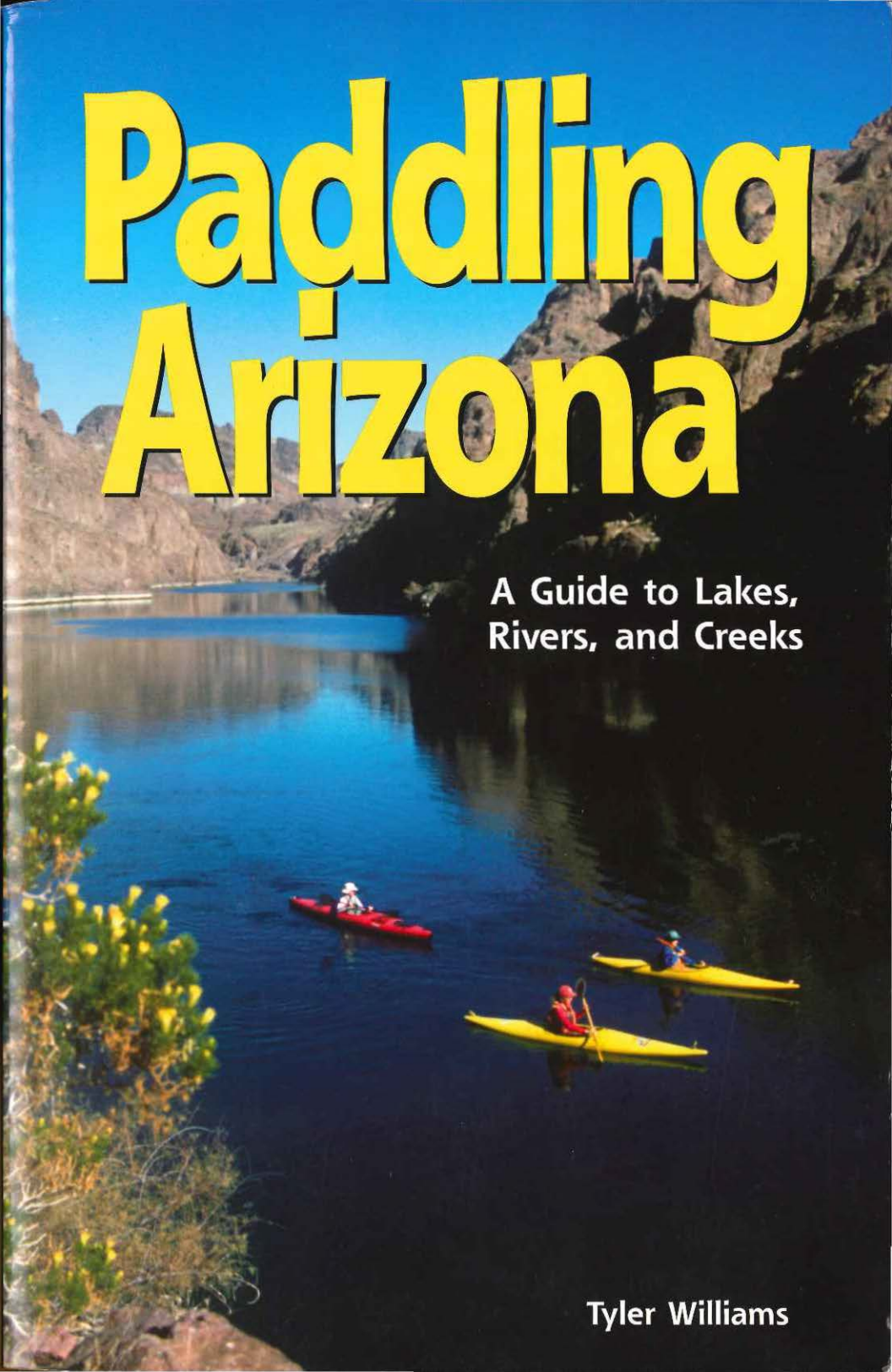


2000

The background of the cover is a photograph of a river winding through a canyon. The water is a deep blue, reflecting the sky and the surrounding rock walls. Three kayakers are visible on the river: one in a red kayak in the middle ground, and two in yellow kayaks in the foreground. The canyon walls are rugged and brown, with some sparse vegetation. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

paddling Arizona

A Guide to Lakes,
Rivers, and Creeks

Tyler Williams

Disclaimer

Paddling is dangerous. Other dangerous activities commonly practiced while on paddling trips include, but are not limited to: portaging, swimming, drinking the water, and driving to and from your destination. Nearly everything about a paddling trip is dangerous. If you don't want to endanger your life, don't go paddling, don't buy this book, and certainly don't use this book.

Nature is constantly changing. Rockslides occur, floods change river and creek channels, beaches erode away, and earthquakes create new terrain altogether. Therefore, any information contained herein should be considered out of date and possibly incorrect.

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Lower Salt River

(Saguaro Lake to Granite Reef)

General Description: A popular section of the Salt River on the outskirts of Phoenix

Motorized Traffic: Low (none)

Difficulty: Advanced (class I—II whitewater)

Length: 10 miles

Flow: minimum: 300 cfs

ideal: 500 — 1,500 cfs

Gage: Salt River below Stewart Mountain Dam

Shuttle: 7 miles, paved, hitchable

Best Season: This stretch is dependent on releases from Saguaro Lake. The most consistent flows tend to come between early May and mid-October. Below the confluence of the Verde, flows are often adequate for runs in winter.

Peak Flow: 64,000 cfs—February 16, 1980. *This is an average flow for that day.*

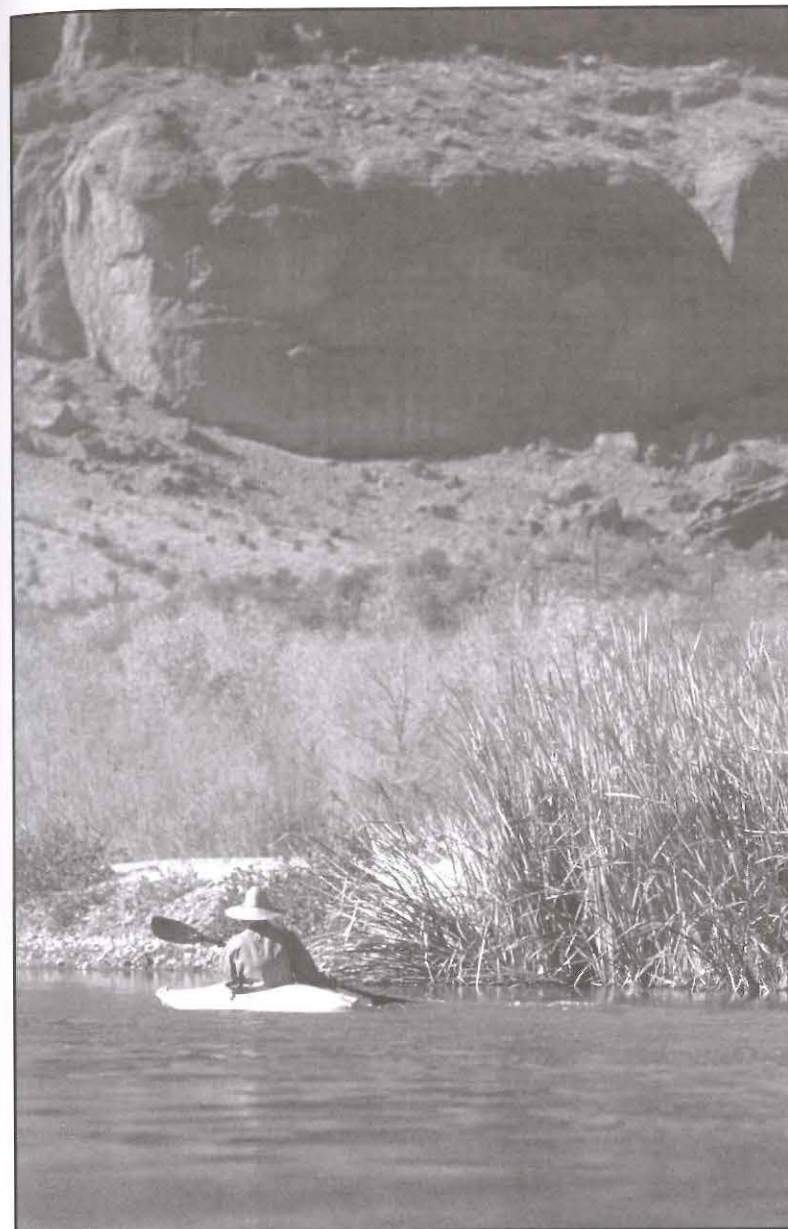
This is a heavily used stretch of river. In summer, the water can be nearly covered bank to bank with inner tubers escaping the city heat. It is a raucous place, a menagerie of party animals, police officers, beer cans, and boom boxes.

This is only the scene on summer weekends, however. Come to the lower Salt midweek, or in the off-season, and you will find a desert river flowing through a scenic, mostly natural setting. There are a number of class I riffles to usher you along, eddies to catch, and even an occasional surf wave or two for the aspiring whitewater paddler.

The farthest upstream one can find good public river access is Pebble Beach. Below here, the river gradually meanders away from the road for a few miles. Bluffs rise steeply from the water in places. Eagles, kingfishers, and herons fly over the cool clear river, and the Sonoran Desert comes to water's edge.

About 6 miles downstream from Pebble Beach, the Verde River enters on river right. During times of low water when there is minimal water being released from Stewart Mtn. Dam, the Verde often adds enough water to allow for a short run below here. Access to this spot is provided via the Phon Sutton Recreation Area.

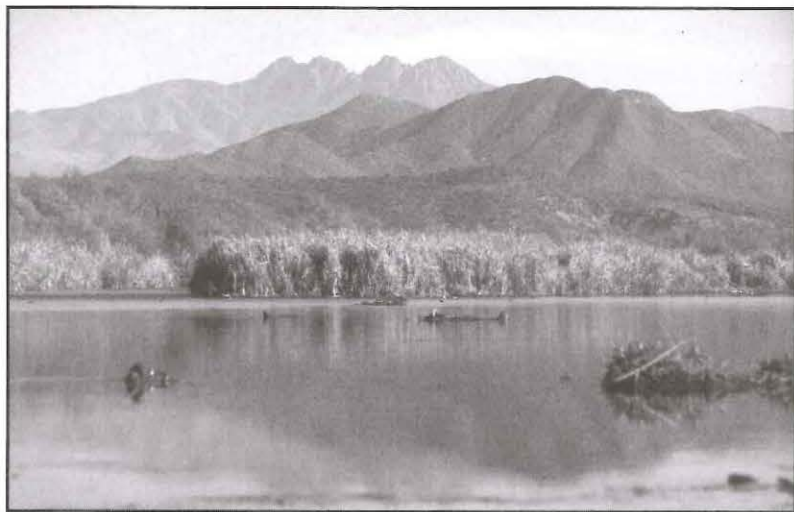
There is a small rapid right at the confluence of the two major desert rivers. Beginners might be challenged here, but a portage on the left is easy. Class I water continues between pools, with a class II rapid coming in a right channel where an island splits the river. This is a good spot for beginning whitewater paddlers to practice eddy turns and ferry angles.



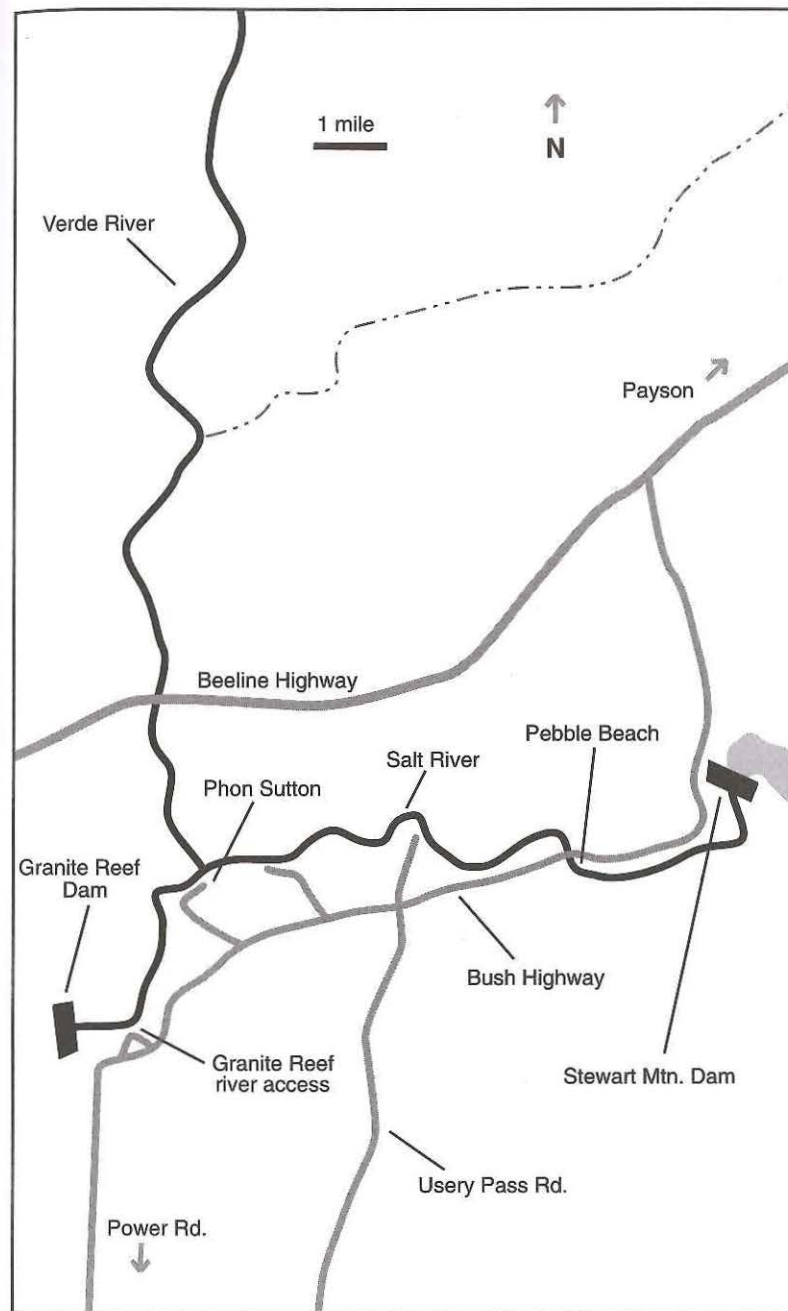
Enjoying a sunny day of river paddling on the outskirts of Phoenix

The last mile of the run mimics lake-like flatness before the Granite Reef take-out. The scenery remains pleasant in this last section, with the Four Peaks forming the skyline upstream, and Mt. McDowell as a backdrop to the north of the river. In winter, egrets and coots congregate on the water. The incoming flight path for Sky Harbor is directly overhead, however, reminding us that we are indeed on the fringe of a large city.

Logistics: Take Power Road north out of Mesa. This road turns into the Bush Highway, and first reaches the Salt River at the Granite Reef river access. From Granite Reef, it is 2.4 miles to the turn for Phon Sutton, 3.4 miles to the Coon Bluff turn, and 7.1 miles to Pebble Beach.



The dramatic Four Peaks rise in close proximity to the Lower Salt



Salt River (Upper-Daily)

General Description: The most popular daily whitewater run in Arizona, with fun rapids in a beautiful canyon

Difficulty: III — III+ (IV)

Gradient: 35 fpm

Length: 6 to 8 miles

Flow: minimum: 500 cfs for rafts, 300 cfs for kayaks, 200 cfs for inflatable kayaks
ideal: 1,000 — 3,000 cfs

Gage: Salt near Chrysotile

Shuttle: 4 to 6 miles, bikeable

Elevation: 3,400'—3,100'

Likely Season: February—early May / Heavy monsoon years provide flows in August and September.

Peak Flow: Chrysotile gage—76,600 cfs January 8, 1993.

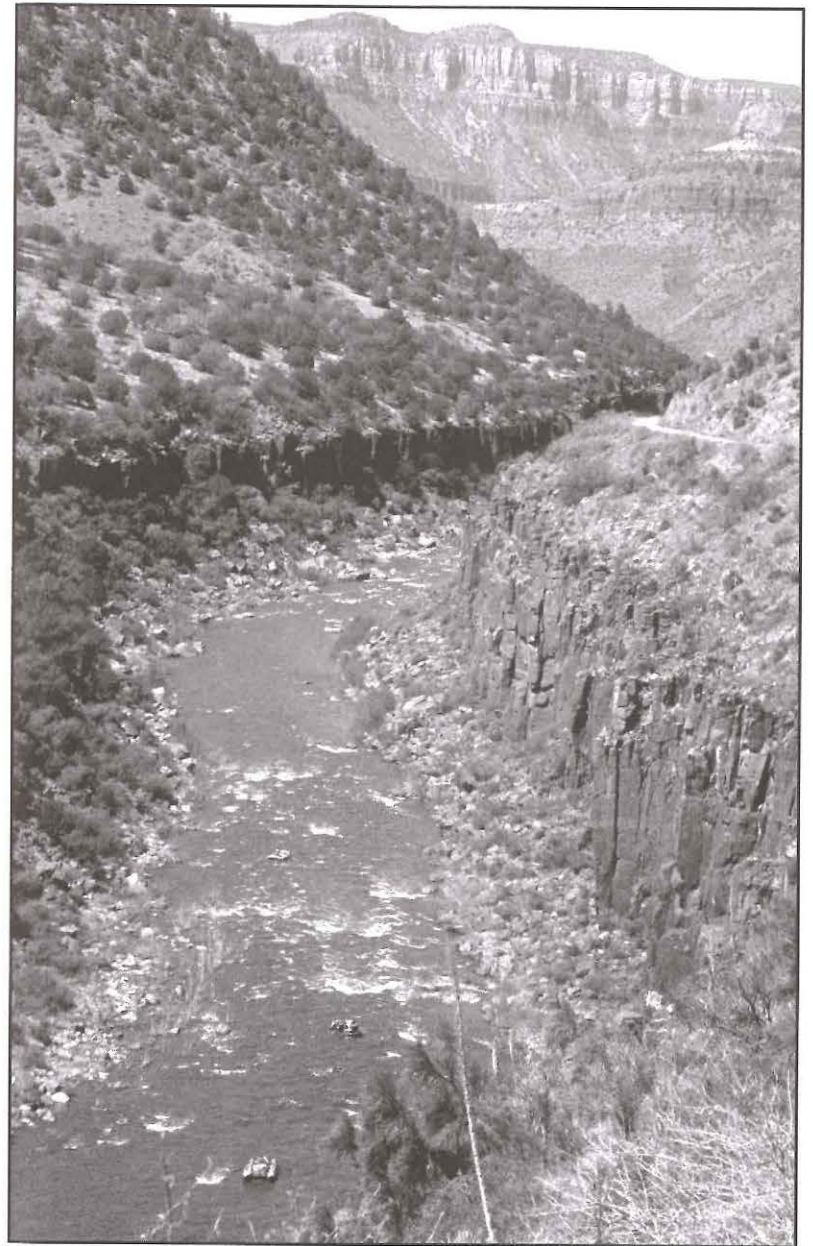
Permits: Permits are required from the Apache Tribe. Details are below. Call 928-338-4385 for more information.

Ask most paddlers throughout the Western U.S. to name a river in Arizona besides the Colorado in Grand Canyon, and they will quickly answer "the Salt." This is the most widely-known whitewater day run in the state, and dedicated paddlers have long been flocking here for early spring boating. There is a commercial rafting scene here as well, making it the first stop on the circuit for full-time river guides.

These boatmen will tell you the first thing you need to know about the Salt is that it is on Apache land. A daily fee is charged (\$15 per person per day in 2006) to run the river, and permits are checked. During the season, you can usually purchase permits at the Salt River Canyon Store on Highway 60. Permits are also sometimes available from K-mart in Show Low, or the Carrizo Junction Store twenty miles north of the river on Highway 60. Contact the Apache Tribe at 928-338-4385 for more information.

The standard put-in is located at a large eddy a few hundred yards down the road from the highway. Some elect to launch closer to the highway bridge, however, and run a gravel bar rapid above the main put-in.

There is another short steep gravel bar leading into a wall immediately below the main put-in eddy, then a long straight-away leads to Tailings Rapid, where the river bends right. Next is Bump & Grind—an aptly named shallow gravel bar. The narrow rapid just below here that sluices against the right wall is called Maytag. This one tends to spin rafts around, hence the name. It is fast and powerful, but straightforward with no big



A rafting party enjoys the Salt

holes. Next is Grumman, where some sizeable holes do lurk. The river makes a sharp right along a cliff wall above Mother Rock. At higher flows, look for a great surf hole above Mother Rock on the right. Next is Eagles Nest, sometimes called Overboard. This is a left turn with some big potentially hazardous rocks along the right bank. At most levels, a good play hole exists toward the bottom of the rapid. This same hole can of course flip small rafts or unsuspecting paddlers.

Some class II water below Eagles Nest is the end of the Mule Hoof Bend section of rapids. If there were a trail, one could hike up to the road from here, and then walk a short quarter mile back to the put-in. For now, this shortcut route is a difficult desert bushwhack that is rarely attempted.

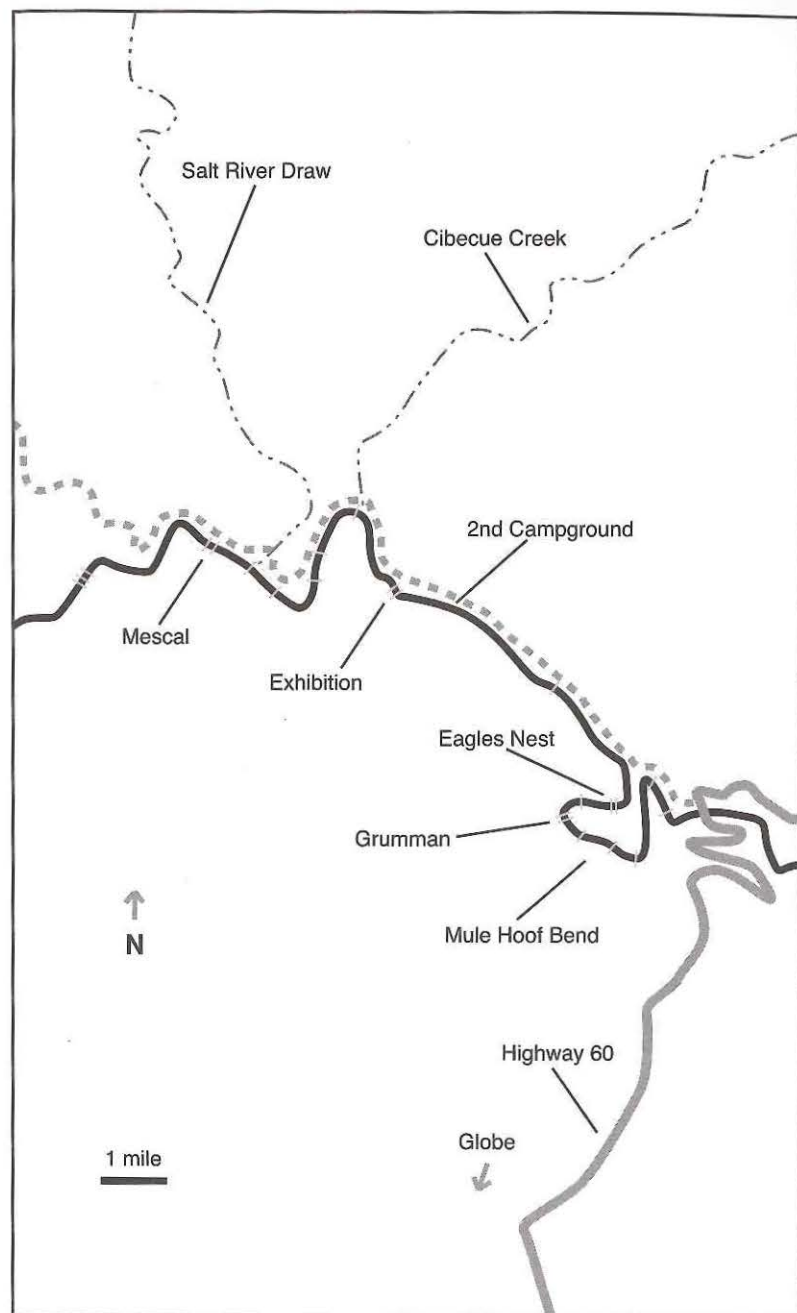
The next few miles of river are splashy class I and II. Just past 2nd Campground where raft guides and other paddlers often camp, the river bends right into Exhibition Rapid. This one holds the biggest waves on the run. A few easy ledge rapids lead down to Cibecue Rapid and Cibecue Creek, a popular take-out.

For those who continue downstream, a steep gravel bar called 3-way keeps the action going, then the river turns right into Salt River Draw Rapid. Next is Mescal, a simple yet forceful drop with a fast and shallow hole. Just below Mescal is the last good place to take out, because the road climbs away from the river after this. Also, the Salt Banks are just downstream on river right. This is a sacred Apache site, and strictly off-limits.

Logistics: The dirt road on river right serves as access for this run. It is rocky and narrow, but passable to two-wheel drives down to Cibecue Creek. Getting across Cibecue often requires four-wheel-drive, and is completely impassable when the creek is high.

There are some small parking spots near Cibecue Creek, and just upstream. If you continue downstream to below Mescal Rapid, there are plenty of parking options there too.

It is 4 miles from the put-in to Cibecue Creek, and another couple miles to the take-outs below Mescal.



Salt River (wilderness)

General Description: A three to five-day run down a classic river in the Sonoran Desert

Difficulty: III—IV

Gradient: 22 fpm

Length: 52 miles (including day stretch)

Flow: minimum: 400 cfs (many runs have been made at lower levels)
ideal: 1,000 — 3,000 cfs

Gage: Salt River near Chrysotile is the put-in gage. Salt River near Roosevelt is the take-out gage.

Shuttle: 64 miles, paved

Elevation: 3,400'—2,200'

Likely Season: March—May

Peak Flow: Chrysotile gage—76,600 cfs January 8, 1993. Roosevelt gage—143,000 cfs January 8, 1993.

Permits: Permits are required for the wilderness section from March 1—May 15. Call the Tonto National Forest (928-402-6200) for more information. Permits from the Apache Tribe are required for the upper section. See the Salt River (upper-daily) description on the previous pages for details.

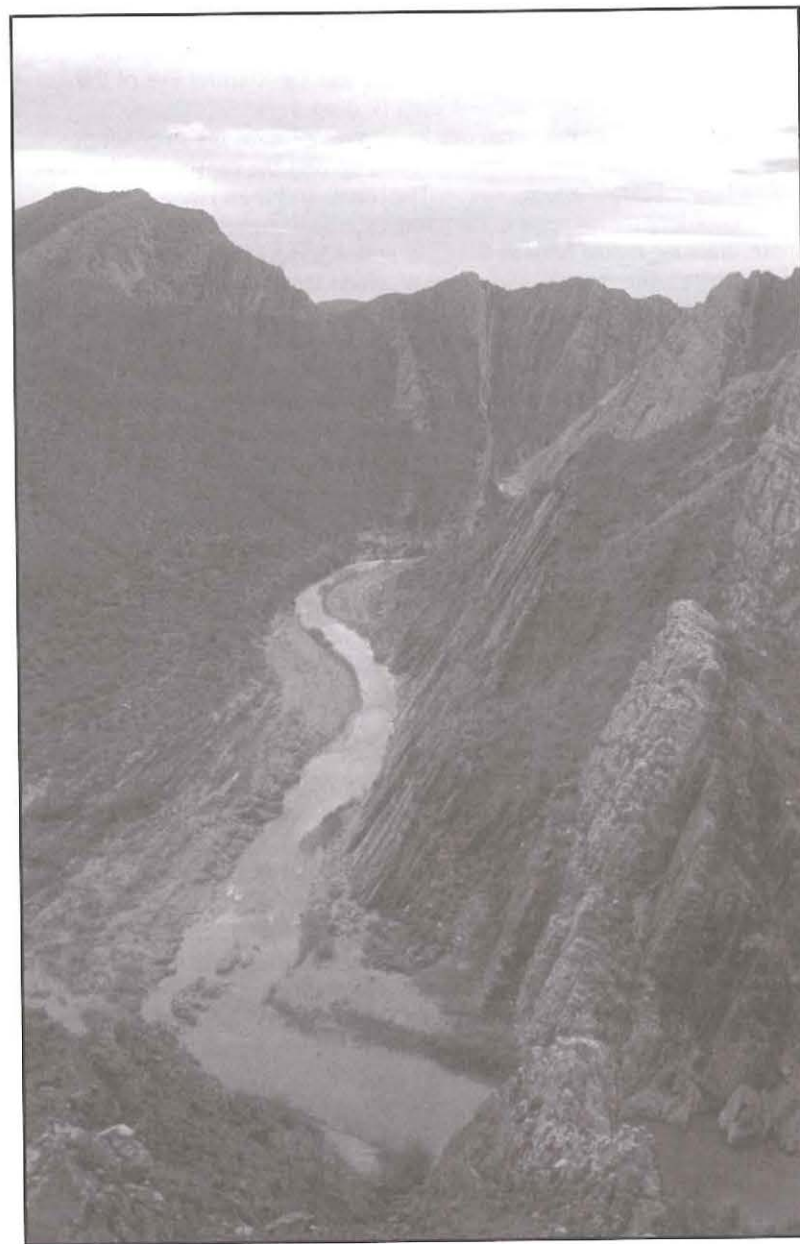
A multi-day on the Salt is the classic Arizona river trip. Great scenery, good hiking, fun rapids, and the surreal juxtaposition of saguaro cactus next to a burgeoning river makes this a must-do trip for dedicated river runners.

Most trips put-in at the Highway 60 bridge. For more detail on these first several miles below the bridge, consult the Salt Daily description in this book.

Once below Ledges Rapid 10 miles downstream of the put-in, you're not likely to see any more of the day paddlers, and a wilderness feel sets in. If you have made it through the rapids of the day stretch, nothing in the next several miles should be of any special concern. White Rock Rapid, however, does come up quickly as the river makes a 90 degree right turn 14 miles down.

As the rapid title implies, the river enters beautiful white granite in this section, narrowing into a low canyon before the confluence of Canyon Creek. The water is swift in here, and you might zoom right by this dramatic side creek if you aren't attentive. Not far below Canyon Creek, the terrain opens at Gleason Flat. There are roads on both sides of the river here. Both roads are long and rough, but they do offer access in a pinch.

Below Gleason the Salt River Canyon Wilderness officially begins on



The Salt winds through Jump Off Canyon

river left, while river right remains the White Mountain Apache Reservation until Lower Corral Canyon, located several miles farther downstream. Within a couple miles below Gleason Flat, you'll encounter Eye of the Needle Rapid, and Black Rock—a class IV drop.

Class II and III action continues for several miles as the river winds through desert hills. The whitewater picks up and the canyon pinches down below Lower Corral Canyon. First is The Maze, and then Pinball. Both of these bouldery rapids require ferry moves in swift current. The scenery gets more dramatic below here as the river enters Jump Off Canyon. Steep fins of Quartzite knife into the river, one of which forms Quartzite Falls.

Quartzite Falls was once a formidable drop containing a very sticky hole, and most trips portaged. In 1993, a misguided engineer who also happened to be a weekend raft guide hiked in and blew up the hydraulic-forming ledge. The once magnificent and powerful rapid is now emasculated to a shadow of its former self. On the brighter side, it is still a solid class IV drop, and the jackass who blew it up with his friends did indeed do some time in the big house.

Just below Quartzite, Corkscrew Rapid is the final major obstacle in Jump Off Canyon. The river remains swift with occasional class III down to Cherry Creek, then you are officially on the paddle out.

This final 16 miles contains nice scenery, some great volleyball/horse-shoes beaches, and wildlife. I was lucky enough to see a mountain lion down here once—a special treat on any river, much less one that runs through saguaro country.

Logistics: The take-out is near the bridge over the Salt on Highway 288 north of Globe. This is a few miles before the Salt runs into Roosevelt Reservoir. There is a gravel parking area for boaters nearby, and a concrete ramp at the river.

To reach the put-in, return to Globe, then proceed north on Highway 60. The put-in is just downstream of the Highway 60 bridge in Salt River Canyon. This is on Apache land, and there is a \$15 per person per day permit required. Call 928-338-4385 for information on where to obtain Apache permits. Call 928-402-6200 for information on wilderness permits from the Tonto National Forest, or visit www.fs.fed.us/r3/tonto/home.shtml

