

The Gunnison River through the Gunnison Gorge offers a technical and remote whitewater experience for rafters, kayakers, and canoeists. Your trip can vary widely, depending on time of year and flow from dam releases and winter snowpack.

Expect high releases of 2,000 to 10,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) in late May and early June. Summer flows can range from 300 cfs in low water years to 2,000+ cfs during big water years.

At flows below 800 cfs, the Gorge is highly technical and is not recommended for rafts over 12 feet in length.

Flows over 5,000 cfs make the Gorge extremely dangerous for boating. Currents become swift and swirly, eddies disappear, and swims are very long.

Rescue is very difficult in the Gorge. If in doubt, SCOUT!

The River Map provides locations and class of rapids. Each raft must carry an extra oar or paddle, first aid kit, repair kit, and extra PFD.

Flow in Cubic Feet per Second (cfs)	Recommend Crafts	Comments
300-600	Canoes, kayaks, inflatable kayaks, and rafts 12 feet or smaller	River is less "pushy" but rapids become more technical, with exposed rocks and narrow passages. Gate Keeper Rapid should be run through left passage
600-1,000	Canoes, kayaks, inflatable kayaks, and rafts 14 feet or smaller	Best flow for less experience and intermediate rafters Challenging for intermediate kayakers
1,000-3,000	Canoes, kayaks, inflatable kayaks, and rafts 16 feet or smaller	Solid class III with some IV possible As flows approach 3,000 cfs, the river becomes "pushy." Many rapids will wash out, while others will form.
3,000 and Over (Rare)	Canoes, kayaks, inflatable kayaks and rafts 16 feet	RECOMMENDED FOR EXPERT BOATERS ONLY Class III and IV

Rapid Name	Class	Description
Chukar	III	Located just downstream of the Chukar put-in; most choose to run center at higher water and the right slot at lower flows; watch out for the pyramid rock center right thirty yards downstream.
One-Miler	III	Run left of the large center hole or rock, depending on flows.
Improvise	III	Mile 1.5; recognized by a small vertical cliff on river right and a prominent rock slide on river left; scout on river left.
Upper and Lower pucker	II+	Miles 2.5 and 3.0; both consist of narrow slots at lower flows; at flows over 6,500 cfs, Upper Pucker has very large standing waves and a giant hole on river left.
Buttermilk	III	Mile 4.0; offers a wild wave ride; run straight down the tongue and watch out for the cliff on the left.
Just below Buttermilk Rapid, you swing the corner and enter Ute Park. Ute Park widens out as the Gunnison River hits the Indian Fault Zone. On river right, you will notice red Entrada Sandstone and on the left, black Precambrian granite. The river gradient drops and the canyon broadens. As you have Ute Park, you drive back into the Black Canyon and the steepest section of the Gunnison Gorge (with the gradient increasing to 35 feet per mile).		
Red Canyon	III	Mile 6.0; Crystal Creek enters from the right; very rocky, requiring technical boating skills to navigate; scout on river right.
Boulder Garden	II+	Beyond Mile 7; look for Baby T-Rex Rock upstream on the right; scout on river left at Boulder Garden boater camp; two routes are most commonly run:
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At flows above 1,000 cfs, most navigate the narrow slot on river right 2. At flows below 1,000 cfs, a slightly more technical route is required, running left and ferrying back to river right at the
Paddle Keeper	III	Just below Boulder Garden; scout river right; very technical and most successfully run on river left, then ferrying back river right; cliff on river left.
T-Dyke	II+	Mile 7.5; last camp until Smith Fork.
Beginning at Mile 9, you encounter the steepest, most difficult section of the Gorge.		
S-Turn	III	Throws you into a cliff on river left.
The Squeeze	III+	Immediately below S-Turn; deceptive, rocky rapid that has wrapped rafts and pinned kayaks; scout on river right; most common run is through the narrow slots at river right.
The Drops	III	Series of three rapids containing many large holes and narrow slots; scout all from river right.
Cable	III/IV	Mile 9.5; extremely technical; scout river right; many large holes enter into two narrow slots; most run the right slot, avoiding the cliff wall on river left.
Jumpin' Jack Splash	III	Run left of the large boulder, finishing river right while avoiding the large hole on river left; watch out for the lateral wave.
Gate Keeper	II/III	Requires navigating a narrow slot either center at higher flows or left against the cliff at flows below 600 cfs.
Grand Finale	III	Scout river right; commonly run by starting river right and avoiding the rocks on river left.
Four miles of Class II water remain until the Gunnison Forks take-out at the confluence with North Fork of the Gunnison River.		