

DANGEROUS ICE CONDITIONS

Float trips into Desolation Canyon during the December through March period frequently encounter dangerous ice conditions. In most years, ice forms on the main stream of the Green River in December. In places, the ice completely blocks the river with no surface water showing at all. Eddies and slack water areas are the first to ice over, making it difficult and dangerous to beach at most campsites.

Around early March the ice of the main stream Green clears and another ice hazard is encountered. When the ice breaks on the White and Duchesne rivers it floats down the Green. A few miles below Sand Wash, the river channel is shallow and braided at the low water levels typical of March. The ice from tributary rivers hangs up in the braided channels and creates dams that may be several feet high. The current flows under these obstruction, they definitely are not navigable. Some March boating parties have been forced to cache their boating equipment and hike out. Since ice dam obstructions are common anywhere between Nine Mile Creek and Lighthouse Rock, the return hike to Sand Wash can take from a few hours to three days, assuming the plateaus are snow free and you have good orienteering skills. To get back to Sand Wash, you must leave the river and cross over the plateau. If you encounter this situation, you must be prepared to self rescue. There is no communication out of the canyon.

If you plan a March trip, we recommend you fly your shuttle on the day of your launch in order to inspect the area between Nine Mile and Lighthouse Rock. If you see any ice (remember, all river obstacles look small from the air), it would be wise to postpone your trip. The ice dams formed by White River ice can appear literally over night. Just because the river was ice free yesterday is no guarantee the channel is clear today. We have seen the river completely ice free at Sand Wash and Green River City but blocked by ice at Stampede Flat.

Should you determine Desolation Canyon is ice free, all the other hazards associated with white water boating will still be present. Cold water (average 40 degrees F.) possible sub-freezing weather and heavy snowfall are additional hazards that early season boater must contend with. The area is remote, road less and seldom visited at this time of year. Boating parties must be adept at cold weather boating tactics, winter camping, hypothermia prevention and treatment and self rescue. Have you tried patching a boat in snowy, 30 degree weather with glue that likes 60+ degrees and less than 50% humidity? Dealt with frozen valves on a raft? Tried to walk on a snow covered boat?

Consider your decision to float Desolation Canyon in the winter or early spring very carefully.

Wet suits or dry suits are essential. Be self-reliant, extra careful and prepared for all hazards. Beware of complacency.