

The Times - Independent

[Home](#)[News](#)[My Moab Times](#)[Blogs](#)[Businesses](#)[Classifieds](#)[Legals](#)[Community](#)[Top Stories](#)[Sports](#)[Business](#)[Outdoors](#)[Lifestyles](#)[Schools](#)[Obituaries](#)[Opinion](#)[articles](#)

Warriors on Cataract brings veterans solace, healing

by Laura Haley

contributing writer

3 days ago | 111 views | 0  | 60  |  |  [Subscribe](#)



Participants in this year's Warriors on Cataract trip return to Moab after three days on the Colorado River. Photo by Scott Ostrom

For the third summer in a row, the waters and beaches of the Colorado River served as a place for healing for a group of military veterans.

On June 7, 23 service members and family, along with three therapists from the Veterans Administration, set off on a three-day trip through Cataract Canyon. The Warriors on Cataract trip was started in 2011 by Frederick Solheim of Boulder, Colo., after he was inspired by the story of a double amputee military veteran who was learning to ski.

Since 2011, Solheim's outdoor excursions for veterans have grown to include two rafting trips down Cataract Canyon, a ski camp in Breckenridge, Colo., and a five-day outdoor retreat near Steamboat Springs, Colo. Despite the program's success, Solheim still wishes he could do more.

"We're only taking 50 down the river," he said. "Another 20 skiing."

Solheim said the group is limited by their funding.

"We're not a nonprofit," he said. "We're a negative profit."

Part of the reason Solheim continues to do the trips is to welcome soldiers home and show them that there are people who care. He said he wishes he could have done the same for soldiers returning from Vietnam.

"If we could have welcomed them home, maybe their lives would have been different," he said.

This year, Solheim had four Vietnam vets on the June 7 trip, including one who worked as a sniper, and Robert Archer, who flew a Skycrane helicopter during the conflict.

Archer heard about the Warriors on Cataract trip two years ago, and when he was invited to go this year he asked his son Greg to go along.

"It was something you could do every day," Archer said, recalling the river rapids and singing around the campfires. "It was very beneficial. I haven't slept all night in 20 years, but I slept all night three nights in a row on this trip."

For Matthew "Fatty" Marrott, of Salt Lake City, this was his third trip down the river with the group. Marrott said the annual trip has changed his life completely.

"I'm a supervisor at Epic Brewing company," he said. "Before, I wouldn't even leave the house."

Marrott said this year was the best trip of the three. "I felt like I didn't have to put any guards up," he said. "I spent a lot more time helping the other guys."

Prior to the trip, Marrott noticed that an employee of his was exhibiting symptoms similar to those Marrott has dealt with as a result of his post traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury. He invited the employee to come on the trip.

Marrott said that the trip serves as an awakening for him. "It shows me that there's an actual world out there that I'm not participating in," he said.

Scott Ostrom from Boulder, Colo., also felt the trip had helped him deal with the challenges of readjusting to civilian life.

"It was great watching everyone unwind," he said. "Maybe that's why the river has so many twists and turns."

Like Marrott, Ostrom has attended the float every year since it began. This year he was asked to serve as the photographer for the trip.

"It's very, very therapeutic," he said. "It's really helped me grow. I leave here so relaxed."

Ostrom was the subject of a Pulitzer Prize-winning photo essay by Craig Walker of the Denver Post. The essay followed Ostrom's struggles to readjust to life after leaving the Marines. Ostrom said the trip helped him to heal.

"It's helped me do things like become a photographer," he said. "I realized I could do more than just sit around. I needed to get out and do something."

Kristi Ruben was one of the VA therapists who attended the trip. Ruben said the experience has many benefits that can't be duplicated in an office setting.

"The camaraderie, the hard work and working with a team that come with outdoor adventure are so valuable," she said. "It really helps the recovery process."

Ruben said the benefits of the trip are evident almost immediately.

"The first night before the trip, everyone is split up," she said. "The people who know each other are talking, but you have one group over here, another over there."

The patio at Red Cliffs Lodge, where the group was having dinner after coming off the river, was buzzing with conversation. "Look around," she said. "You can't get a word in edgewise."

Solheim said the trip wouldn't have been possible without the support of Tag-A-Long Expeditions, Mike Bynum and the Aarchway Inn, and Colin Fryer of Red Cliffs Lodge.
