

Four Uncommon Outdoor Adventures

Contributed by Steve Gillman
Tuesday, 19 August 2008

When you are ready for outdoor adventures, but want to try something new, you have to think in new ways. Forget the mountain bike or the paid rafting tour. Here are some low budget interesting things you may not have tried.

When you are ready for outdoor adventures, but want to try something new, you have to think in new ways. Forget the mountain bike or the paid rafting tour. Here are some low budget interesting things you may not have tried.

Mine Hunting

A friend and I have been to Phantom Canyon six times this spring, hiking in the hills and exploring narrow gulches. Five of those times we have found an abandoned mine or two. Most were less than forty feet deep, and a classic hole in the wall. One was discovered by following a trail of beautiful quartz boulders uphill for twenty minutes, until we found where the rocks had been blown apart many years ago. There is a wall of pure quartz there, perhaps fifteen feet high and twenty wide. I have never seen anything like it.

Some of these are old claims on public lands. We just like to poke around, but in recent years treasure hunters have been taking metal detectors to these old mines to work over the tailings piles. Occasional gold nuggets are found inside the rocks there. To make this outdoor adventure more profitable and adventurous, you need to find the mines that are five miles or more from any road, like those in the San Juan mountains of southwestern Colorado.

How do you find them? We started by going online and searching "mines." We obtained a list of 160 mines in Fremont County, Colorado alone. But only one of the five we recently found was on the list. Just hiking in mining country and keeping your eyes open works too. You can also find old mines noted on many topographical maps.

Searching For Swimming Holes

Ask around and you might get directions to hidden swimming holes. We found a beautiful one a mile down a small creek in this way. We also met fifteen other people there, jumping from the cliffs into a small pool.

If you want to find less populated ones, you need to get a topographical map and start searching. Look for narrow canyons with year-round streams (hard hiking and climbing assures you that there won't be a crowd). Then you need to get out there and start exploring. I was out the other day swimming in a nice pool below a nine-foot waterfall, and in the six times I have been in that canyon, I have never seen another person.

Huckleberry Finn Adventures

Have you ever thought about building a raft and floating down a river like Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer? This works best in wide rivers that have long stretches without rapids. We used to do it on the Manistee River in Michigan.

Our rafting adventures usually started with parking the car downstream from a long wild stretch and walking up the river for a hour or so, taking a shortcut that cut past the big loops and bends. We carried snacks and water, a saw and hatchet, and scraps of rope. By afternoon we had built a raft of dead trees and began the float back to the car. That's usually when the real fun started. Here's a tip: have long poles for controlling the 1,500-pound pile of logs and humans you'll be guiding around and under trees.

Fishing For Smelt By Hand

In Northern Michigan and Wisconsin the smelt run up many streams in the early spring. People love these fish because they are easily cleaned and when deep fried do not need to be scaled. One night I saw the back of a pickup truck filled

with the smelt from one small creek. They are caught simply by dipping a net in and scooping them out.

It's nice to get outdoors at night (when the smelt run), but for a bit more fun, try catching them by hand. Just lay on the creek bank and hold the flashlight over the water. When a smelt swims by, quickly pin it to the bottom and grab it. I have caught 40 in a hour using this technique. They made a decent meal for several of us. This last one isn't the most exciting of these outdoor adventures, but it is satisfying to catch dinner with your own hands.

Copyright Steve Gillman. Ready for a Treasure Hunting Adventure? To win real prizes join The Great Colorado Treasure Hunt, at: <http://www.ColoradoTreasureHunting.com>