The San Juan River cuts through the heart of the Colorado Plateau exposing the history of the earth, red rock, blue sky and green cottonwood and willows fed by the river. The night sky is filled with stars. Birdsong rises with the morning sun.

The 84 mile stretch of the San Juan River from Bluff to Clay Hills, Utah exposes sedimentary rock layers chronicling 300 million years of Earth’s history. The fossil-rich limestone and sandstone born of hardened dunes are a layer-cake of Earth’s history read like an open book of deep environmental history.

For 12,000 years people have lived in and around the San Juan River. The first cultures known to occupy the region were nomadic hunters who followed Ice Age megafauna across the landscape. Evidence of the Ancestral Puebloans flanks the river, offering glimpses of the old ways of life. The Butler Wash petroglyph panel features one of the largest concentrations of rock art in the Southwest. Visitors can walk on ancient trails and explore cliff dwellings, kiva sites, and moki steps on the way downriver. The San Juan region remains the homeland of the Diné (Navajo). Families still live and cultivate the land on the south side of the river.

A San Juan trip with Northern Arizona University offers visitors a unique and personal perspective of the rich human and natural history of the region. University scholars blend stories from a range of disciplines tailored to fit a group’s interest. Our Diné and Hopi guides are trained in ethnobotany and geology, and bring an intimate knowledge of the landscape rooted in generations of living with the land. Ho-zhóó, Navajo for the “beauty way,” is defined as the harmonious balance between man and nature. We are committed to maintaining this harmony and respect for the land through the preservation of past, current, and future cultural sites and traditions.

In 1936, Norm Nevills was the first boatman to run the 191 miles of the San Juan River to Lees Ferry, Arizona. This endeavor led to Nevills Expeditions, the first commercial river company providing trips down the Grand Canyon and eventually Utah rivers such as the San Juan and Green Rivers. Norm Nevills was and still is known as the number one whitewater boatman in the industry.

The Ecological Monitoring & Assessment Program & Foundation and NAU Outdoors at Northern Arizona University offer trips rooted in the spirit of adventure embodied by Norm Nevills’ inaugural run of the San Juan River, with a deep understanding of the special role that the river has played in the natural and human history of the Colorado Plateau. Join us as we float along a meandering ribbon of water as it traverses through some of the most distinctive landscapes of the West, and you’re sure to have an unforgettable experience.

For more information, contact Shawn.Newell at Shawn.Newell@nau.edu or (928) 523-8285.

For more information, visit the EMA Program website at www.emaprogram.com/SanJuan.asp