



2026 River Runners Hall of Fame

Dear River Colleagues,

The John Wesley Powell River History Museum is conducting the 2026 River Runners Hall of Fame inductee ceremony and festival in Green River, Utah, on Friday and Saturday, October 2 and 3. We eagerly invite you to attend and we ask for your financial support to ensure the success of this event.

The theme this year is **Dream Big, Go Big, Live Big!**

The 2026 River Runners Hall of Fame inductees are as follows.

The European Kayak Trio: Coming from war-torn Europe, World Champion kayakers Walter Kirschbaum, Roger Paris, and Ulrich Martins came to the United States in the 1950s and 1960s to compete at the FIBArk kayak races in Salida, Colorado, on the Arkansas River. These early influencers remained in the U.S. and left a lasting impact on kayaking on the Colorado Plateau. In addition to their many first descents, including Gore Canyon, Black Canyon of the Gunnison, and a historic low-water run of Grand Canyon, their kayaking techniques are embodied in today's champion kayakers and adventurous paddlers.

Mildred Davis: "Millie" Davis is credited with being the first American woman to float through Westwater Canyon at age 14 and the first woman to row her own boat through the Canyon of Lodore at age 16.

Linda Wittkopf: "Big Linda" Wittkopf, beloved guide, and mentor in the Moab boating community, is a two-time record breaker for rowing Cataract Canyon—without flipping—at the highest flows in 1983 and again in 1984. She may also hold the speed record in Cataract Canyon.

Kenton Grua: Kenton Grua is recognized for a lifetime of achievements in the Grand Canyon and his lasting contributions to the Grand Canyon community. In addition to holding the record for the fastest oar boat run through Grand Canyon and becoming the first person in modern recorded history to thru-hike its entire length, Kenton played a critical role in the creation of Grand Canyon River Guides and was a steadfast advocate for the canyon and the Colorado River.

We are especially excited this year to host best-selling author of *The Emerald Mile* and *A Walk In The Park*, **Kevin Fedarko**, who will speak about the significance of Kenton Grua's accomplishments. Kevin is an acclaimed American author, journalist, and adventurer best known for his immersive narrative nonfiction books about exploration, conservation, and

RIVER RUNNERS HALL OF FAME COMMITTEE

Levi Jamison, Chair
Linda Jalbert
Annie Payne
Susan Munroe

Latimer Smith
Jack Schmidt
Roy Webb
Robert Hollahan
Matt Williams

Eva Hatch
Mike Milligan
Museum Staff Liaisons
Janet Everts Smoak, Executive Director
Candice Cravins, Development Coordinator

*Celebrating the pioneers, innovators, and stewards of river running across the Colorado Plateau.
An annual program of the Friends of the John Wesley Powell River History Museum.*



the Grand Canyon. He combines intense physical feats with deep historical, ecological, and cultural reporting.

The River Runners Hall of Fame induction ceremony has been a sold-out event each of the past three years, and 2026 is shaping up to be no exception. The accomplishments, influence, and widespread respect earned by this year's inductees are expected to draw attendees from across the river-running community and beyond. Tickets go on sale July 18 and are expected to sell out quickly. Sponsorship provides guaranteed admission and the opportunity to join friends, family, and fellow river runners. As always, active river guides receive free admission to the event upon request, a feat that would be impossible if not for the generosity of our sponsors.

The John Wesley Powell River History Museum is dedicated to documenting, preserving, and sharing the stories of river running on the Colorado Plateau, a landscape widely recognized as one of the birthplaces of river running. The museum educates river runners and the public at large of the importance of the Colorado River system, including the Green River, on whose banks the museum is located. Finally, and possibly most importantly, the museum seeks to foster and grow the river-running community. The annual hall of fame celebration is the museum's most significant event in terms of realizing the museum's directives and is the single most important fundraiser of the year. The event has grown into a cherished tradition, a gathering of a diverse group of river runners to celebrate the very best of our community and history.

We humbly ask you to support the John Wesley Powell River History Museum. The museum could not exist without the generosity of the outfitting community and merchandise dealers throughout the country. We offer six sponsorship levels, each providing recognition and additional advertising and promotional benefits, as outlined on the following page. We have also included a preliminary schedule of events for the weekend and information on available sponsorship payment options.

We hope you will join us this October and that you will become a sponsor of the John Wesley Powell River History Museum River Runners Hall of Fame Event.

Sincerely,

Annie Tueller Payne
Executive Producer
River Runners Hall of Fame

Janet Smoak
Executive Director
JW Powell River History Museum





Benefits of Sponsorship

Although we accept all donations, we have outlined six levels of support: The Major John Wesley Powell, The Confluence, The Colorado River, The Green River, The San Juan River, and The Dolores River. All six levels offer benefits, including guaranteed admission to the festival in October (last year, the event sold out within a few weeks).

Each level offers a variety of possible benefits, including festival passes, meals, your logo on marketing material, and various means of recognition commensurate with your contribution. Our highest level of sponsorship, "The Major," comes with an additional namesake sponsor opportunity (the River Runners Lunch and Swayze's breakfast are already claimed!). Reach out to your contact to discuss other possibilities.

Sponsorship Level	The Major: John Wesley Powell	The Confluence	The Colorado River	The Green River	The San Juan River	The Dolores River
Cash Donations	\$25,000	\$10,000	\$5,000	\$2,500	\$1000	\$500
Festival Tickets	10	8	8	4	2	1
Banner on Stage	X	X	X			
Recognition on all Marketing	X	X	X	X		
Logo on T-shirt	X	X	X	X	X	
Logo/Name on Festival Poster	X	X	X	X	X	X
Social Media Shout-Out	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hyper Link on Museum Website	X	X	X	X	X	X
Emcee Shout-Outs	Both nights	Both nights	Both nights	Saturday	Friday	



Dream Big, Live Big, Go Big

Schedule of Events

Friday Evening, October 2

Stories and Induction of a Young Adventurer: Millie Davis
by Janet Smoak with a special appearance by Millie herself!

European Kayakers: Walter Kirschbaum, Ulrich Martins, Roger Paris
by Kent Ford

After Party at Ray's Tavern

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#### **Saturday, October 3**

#### **Pancake Breakfast & Service Project at Swasey's Beach**

Sponsored by Holiday River Expeditions

#### **Go Big Float Parade**

Saturday afternoon

#### **Deli-Style Lunch, Green River State Park**

Sponsored by OARS

#### **Loie Belknap Evans Opening Reception & Riverside Dinner**

Sponsored by TBA

#### **Induction Ceremonies**

Presentation and Induction of Big Linda Wittkopf by Annie Tueller Payne  
Presentation and Induction of Kenton Grua by Michelle Grua

#### **Concluding Remarks by Kevin Fedarko**

Author of The Emerald Mile & A Walk in the Park





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## Become A Sponsor

The John Wesley Powell River History Museum inspires stewardship of the Colorado Plateau's rivers through education, scientific understanding, community engagement and the preservation of our shared heritage. During the next five years, we will transform the museum into a premier center for learning, collaboration, and discovery, modernizing our permanent exhibits while creating a new riverfront learning and collections facility. These investments will expand educational programming, preserve irreplaceable river-running artifacts, and create new spaces for workshops, conferences, community gatherings, and public events.

The John Wesley Powell River History Museum, Inc., is an IRS-recognized 501(c)(3) organization and will send a tax-deductible receipt for all donations made. We can receive cash, check, or credit cards (be aware there are extra fees for credit card payments). We are happy to provide invoices or make any other accommodations required to make the donation an easy process.

**Checks** can be made out to: The John Wesley Powell River History Museum

**Mail to: Janet Smoak**

PO Box 387

Green River, UT 84525

**Credit Card** payment, click link: <https://johnwesleypowell.betterworld.org/donate>

**Choose the OTHER button and type in amount**

*(Please be aware that a processing fee is automatically added to the donation amount.)*

Contact Janet Smoak to help facilitate any part of the donation process or with questions.

**Email:** [jwpdirector@gmail.com](mailto:jwpdirector@gmail.com) **Phone:** (435) 564-0025 office; or leave a message on (425) 326-6601 cell

Watch the website for updates & information at <https://johnwesleypowell.com/> and on the Hall of Fame page <https://johnwesleypowell.com/2026-river-runners-hall-of-fame-festival/>

**Thank you for considering supporting the River Runners Hall of Fame and the John Wesley Powell River History Museum. Your sponsorship helps honor the individuals who shaped river history and supports the museum's mission to connect people and communities to the cultures, landscapes, and stories of the Colorado Plateau.**

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## **River Runners Hall of Fame Festival Event Planning Committee**

Committee members represent many corners of the Colorado Plateau River community. Together, the committee includes river guides, outfitters, historians, scientists, public land managers, educators, museum professionals, and conservation leaders. Their collective experience and enthusiasm help make the annual Hall of Fame celebration a memorable gathering for river runners from around the world.

### **Levi Jamison**

#### **Chair • Songbird Oars**

Levi Jamison is the founder of Songbird Oars and a respected craftsman known throughout the river community for his handcrafted wooden oars. A longtime river runner and supporter of the John Wesley Powell River History Museum, Levi serves as Chair of the Committee.

### **Linda Jalbert**

#### **National Park Service (Ret.)**

Linda Jalbert devoted her career to Grand Canyon National Park, where she helped shape wilderness and Colorado River management. A past president of the River Management Society, she continues to support river education and stewardship while bringing decades of public lands experience to the Hall of Fame committee.

### **Annie Payne**

#### **Chair, Friends of the John Wesley Powell River History Museum**

Annie Payne has spent more than three decades serving the river community as a guide, outdoor recreation leader, advocate, and nonprofit volunteer. She leads sponsorship development and serves as Executive Producer of the River Runners Hall of Fame, helping guide the vision and success of the annual celebration.

### **Susan Munroe**

#### **Holiday River Expeditions**

Susan Munroe combines years of experience as a river guide, educator, writer, and communications professional with Holiday River Expeditions. She is passionate about sharing river history and helping connect new generations with the landscapes and stories of the Colorado Plateau.

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**Latimer Smith**  
**OARS**

Latimer Smith has spent his career guiding and managing Grand Canyon River trips while serving in leadership roles throughout the boating community. His operational experience and longstanding relationships across the river industry make him an invaluable member of the Hall of Fame planning team.

**Jack Schmidt**  
**Utah State University**

Jack Schmidt is one of the nation's leading Colorado River scientists and serves as Director of the Center for Colorado River Studies. His lifelong commitment to understanding the river's landscapes and history helps connect the Hall of Fame with the broader story of the Colorado Plateau.

**Roy Webb**  
**River Historian & Archivist**

Roy Webb is one of the foremost historians of western river running and a 2024 River Runners Hall of Fame inductee. After a distinguished career as an archivist at the University of Utah, he continues to research, write, and preserve the stories of river runners throughout the Colorado Plateau.

**Robert Hollahan**  
**Bureau of Land Management**

Robert Hollahan serves as a Bureau of Land Management River Ranger, helping manage recreation, safety, and stewardship on Utah's rivers. His practical knowledge of river operations and long partnership with the Hall of Fame strengthen the committee's event planning efforts.

**Matt Williams**  
**Holiday River Expeditions**

Matt Williams is a river guide, writer, and educator whose work blends outdoor recreation with history and interpretation. Through Holiday River Expeditions, he helps connect guests with the landscapes, culture, and stories of the Colorado Plateau.





## **Eva Hatch**

### **Hatch River Expeditions**

Representing the fourth generation of the Hatch family, Eva Hatch combines outfitter operations with storytelling and public outreach. Her enthusiasm for river history and the next generation of boaters brings fresh perspective to the Hall of Fame.

## **Mike Milligan**

### **Author & River Historian**

Mike Milligan is a veteran river guide, historian, and author whose books have preserved the stories of the Upper Colorado River country. His historical knowledge and deep ties to the boating community help shape Hall of Fame programming and interpretation.

## **Janet Smoak**

### **Executive Director, John Wesley Powell River History Museum**

Janet Smoak serves as Executive Director of the John Wesley Powell River History Museum, coordinating the Hall of Fame with the volunteer committee while advancing the museum's mission to preserve and share the history of river running across the Colorado Plateau.

