

When we got to the corral, we asked about joining in that day's venture. We were told that the ride is so popular, it's sold out at least a year in advance. So we watched the mules get hitched up, tourist riders being instructed by the drovers. Then all started on their ride as we waved a disappointed farewell.

The Bright Angel Trail has been the site for Grand Canyon mule trips since 1891. Posted regulations say riders must be physically fit, not more than two months' pregnant, at least 4 feet 7 inches tall (sorry, kids), weigh less than 200 pounds (sorry, cousin Lardbutt) and know enough English to follow all instructions (lo siento, tio Pedro).

Charge for a one-day mule trip with lunch is about \$200; for two days, including overnight in a cabin and meals at the Canyon bottom, run from about \$550. For private parties and longer trips, the costs go accordingly higher.

Of course, there were many other great activities at the Canyon. We hiked the South Rim and marveled at how the sun painted a changing variety of colors as it passed above us. There was also an evening campfire barbeque, history lesson and music presentation by the Park Ranger staff in the nearby woodlands.

We also tried to hike along the beginnings of the mule track at Bright Angel Trail, but chickened out when we saw how narrow and steep it was. It gave these shaky old folks a great admiration for the mules who are miraculously surefooted. Will we go back and next time be all booked up correctly a year in advance for the ride? We can be as stubborn as mules, too. Of course we'll be back.