

NAVAJO WILDLANDS

by

Philip Hyde
and
Dr. Stephen C. Jett.

This recent publication by the Sierra Club of California, is another in the series of magnificent volumes resounding the cry of the conservationists to protect our land. This book, Navajo Wildlands, by Philip Hyde, photographer, and Dr. Stephen Jett, geographer, contains superb color plates together with a descriptive, sensitive and beautiful text by Dr. Jett. In addition this fine work by the authors, quotations from Clarence Dutton, Joseph Wood Krutch, Willa Cather and Oliver LaFarge are interspersed throughout the book, as are also one version of the Navaho Creation Story and many quotations from Navaho Chants. This the book becomes a composite of thought- of Navaho legend and song, all related to this incredible land.

To accompany these many thoughts are more than seventy beautiful color photographs by Philip Hyde. His contribution is impressive indeed. In a statement entitled "Toward a Sense of Space", Mr. Hyde reveals understanding and knowledge of this land, and underscores his approach to his tremendous task. Seeking proper locations, finding the best lighting conditions and the best times of year, solving the problems of immense distance, perspective and scale are only a part of a photographer's work in producing such a series as this book contains. He has succeeded in great measure. His Pictures show his ~~skill~~ of eye, and his skill in capturing effects of textures mood,, of clarity, and of ~~substance~~ give his pictures substance in

interpreting this ever changing landscape. His fine sense of design is most satisfying, and his sense of form makes one walk into the land. There are pictures of enormous scope, great spaces depicted with brilliant clearness and depth. There are close up intimate details, beautiful in texture, form and color. There are some revealing the stark harshness of the barren rocky places, austere and somewhat frightening to many beholders.

To name a few of the plates which seem to me to possess qualities of particular achievement are

View Across Beautiful Valley where the transition from the warm reds and oranges of the foreground to the distant cool mountains is a superb achievement.

Dunes Near Canyon de Chelly, where the finest holds true with beautiful simplicity.

Sandstone Wall, Canyon de Chelly, one of the finest in the whole series.

Sourdough Pass, Monument Valley which is so rich in form and third demension.

The Great Kiva of Chetro Kettle, at Chaco Canyon where man first shows his ability as a builder in these regions.

ELEPHANT BUTTE Camel Buttes in Monument Valley. a truly great landscape.

Storm at Mouth of Canyon de Chelly, which captures mood and effect of light superbly.

Detail of Chinle Formation, Beautiful Valley, a quiet detail, beautiful in line and color.

Canyon at Aztec Creek. A fine example of the stark, forbidding places.

All of the Petroglyph and pictograph series.

The San Juan River, illustrating beautifully the sub-title of the book.

Most of the photographs are from the western part of the Navaho reservation, only about a half dozed from the eastern side. One misses Shiprock, so prominent in Navaho legend and history, and such an important landmark. Other omissions are Navaho Mountain and Goose Necks of the San Juan River, a truly pertinent site. Perhaps Mr. Hyde was limited in the time allotted to him to complete this assignment. We can hope that there may be another volume someday for there are still many important areas to include in presenting the whole story. While the purpose of this book is to reveal the land, one misses at least a glimpse of the Dine, the Navaho People who live here, and who sing the chants included in the text. The one human touch is the series of quotations from Oliver LaFarge which tell so graphically the relationship of the Navaho to their land.

Dr. Jett's beautifully written text is highly informative, full of understanding of and love for this extraordinary land. One wishes it were much longer, for it is in such harmony with Mr. Hyde's pictures. His epilogue is a poetic summary of the purpose of the book. The inclusion of the quotations from other authors seems superfluous, yet each has something special to add, and the final quote from Willa Cather's Death Comes for the Archdeacon, is poignant indeed and a fitting end to the book.

The quotations from the Navaho Chants add poetry to the book, but so many of them break up the flow of the rest of the text. And one wonders what someone who knows nothing of this land or the people will get from them. This is especially true when one remembers that these are translations by white men, and the English words

do not altogether convey the Navaho concept. Their repetition looses the true Navaho meaning. And I wish there were a table of contents and an index to the pictures, for a number of them are far removed from Dr. Jett's description of them. It seems that there could have been better co-ordination here. These are very minor criticisms. This is a book one wants to own, to look at again and again. We may well be most grateful to Mr. Hyde and Dr. Jett for their share, and to the Sierra Club for so fine a production. We hope that Navaho People will benefit from this superlative portrayal of their land, and that their rivers will be protected so that they keep freely running.

Laura Gilpin
Santa Fe, N.M.