TRADERS TO THE NAVAJOS

The Story of
The Wetherills of Kayenta

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With Illustrations

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VIII

Seeking a Living Earth

Now they began to tell Asthon Sosi the clan legends. Wolfkiller, in giving her the legend of his own clan, the Deer Water People, told her of the beginnings of things just as his mother had told him long before: [1]

Our people once lived in a land that was all dark. I mean they did not know anything about the things around them. It was like the darkness of night. As they had not found the spirit of speech, they were like the animals today. They could not talk to each other very much, and each one went his own way, finding the foods he could eat, and not caring what the others did.

Soon they came up a little higher, and then they moved to another place where the land was a little better. But still they were not very intelligent. Yew-We-Yash they called this place, The Land Where the Earth Tipped Over. Something happened there, which was as if the earth were tipping. They stayed there for a time, but they were getting more intelligent as the years went by. The soil in that place was very poor — all rocks and fine sand — and the water was salty. Soon they moved to a place that was beautiful, where there were trees and flowers and many kinds of food. Here they lived happily for many years.

[1] It is interesting to compare this clan legend with the Navajo Origin Legend with which it intersects at several points — especially in connection with the quarrel of the sexes and the theft of the Water Monster's children by Coyote. (See Washington Matthews, *Navaho Legends*, published for the American Folk Lore Society by Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1897, pp. 71–74, 77.)

background for marked paragraph on next page

we know that our sons are not wearing themselves out. If they did not have some rest they would soon die, and with them would go the whole of the people. We have this to be thankful for. Yet it might be better for all the people to die if they must go on as they are now, leaving their wives to feed them as a bird feeds its young. The male bird, however, does help to feed the young birds, and with us it is as if the male bird had been killed, leaving the mother to do the work all alone.'

The old people told the young men that they must work to live, but nothing they said would do any good. Just when things were at their worst, when there was no food laid by from the abundance that was everywhere, there came a time when the rain did not come, and all the plants dried up, and the trees did not bloom. The people lived on fish from the great water and on berries and roots. At last nothing was left but the fish. Then white spots came out on some of the people's hands and bodies. They grew weaker and many died. Still the rains did not come. Some of the people said:

'It is our own fault. We were not satisfied when we had plenty, and we did not try to save. We thought that we alone counted. We thought the earth was made for us. Now we must do something to find peace.'

But still the people would not listen; and so they went out in small groups. As the water dried up, day after day, the springs grew weaker, and the streams did not run. At that time, they say, there were many more streams than there are now. Soon the animals started to move toward the higher land where the sun came through the curtains of dawn. Day after day it grew hotter and drier. The people began moving toward the dawn, following the

animals and birds. Then there ceased to blow. There was The birds could not fly, and the thirst and hunger. Still the land where they could get food bodies.

Our group came to a place at there was still a spring living four deer drinking. That is Water Clan.

There were still a few there for a short time and then out some of the strong men living on the earth. By this There were a few rats and on these.

The men came back and some water to the east, and and a few deer and antelope. land was white hot sand. bones and dry parched skin dead.

But the men who had the earth was still alive, and a few antelope and deer gled on. As the days went strong enough to go on. die. Day after day this come. And the earth grew

When they reached the few plants, as the men had there were only four people

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their hogan fires. 'We

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first white men to see Rainbow Bridge. Or were they the first? See attached Heald article.

X

The Old People — and the Rock Rainbow

In the canyons of the desert country the forgotten houses of the Old People were standing — their windows black against red cliffs. Forgotten houses of a people worn out by a long struggle with drought and hail, worn out by intermarriage, moving in search of life...

John Wetherill, who in 1906 and 1907 had already seen many of the houses of the Tsegi, still pushed on to the unexplored side canyons, still thought sometimes of the Rock Rainbow that somewhere spanned a canyon.

When Herbert E. Gregory, of the United States Geological Survey, came to the Navajo country in 1909 on a geological reconnaissance, John Wetherill told him of the undiscovered bridge. But Gregory, busy with his survey, did not seek it.

That same summer Byron Cummings, of the University of Utah, brought several of his students on an archæological expedition into the Navajo country; and John Wetherill, already a veteran guide to scientific expeditions, and already well known for his own excavations, guided the Cummings party on their hunt for ruins. He told them also of the Rock Rainbow which the One-Eyed Man of the Salt Clan had seen and which the Laugher had sought in vain.

In August, 1909, Dr. Cummings again came to the country of the People with his students — Malcolm Cummings, Neil Judd, Donald Beauregard, and Stuart Young. Again John Wetherill, skilled in archæological

work and secure in his knowledge of the country, was guide.

In Navajo Canyon they found four or five ruins, unnamed, which had not been worked or known before.

One by one the high quiet dwelling-places of the Old People were coming to light — Inscription House with the half-obliterated seventeenth-century date which the Spaniards had placed upon it — a house which now for the first time was to be carefully investigated.

Aski Yazi, Etai Yazi, and Malcolm Cummings, the three children, had the delight of coming first upon that old inscription which was to give the house its name — the record left by still another people moving upon the face of the desert land.

Then they turned again to the Tsegi, that many-branched canyon of red cliffs and dark spruce trees which seemed to hold so many secrets of the past.

They came one day to a place of grass and wild roses, and high above them saw the crumbling walls of a ruin they had not known.

John Wetherill, climbing up the face of the rock, discovered two names carved there — Charlie Mason and Richard Wetherill. On their trips in '94 and '96 into this country around El Capitan and Marsh Pass, they too had come up this canyon of green spruce and aspen, of sweet wild roses. And they had been first to Kietsiel.

Still unexcavated, the hundred and fifty rooms lay before them — red-walled houses clinging to the back of the shallow cave. They picked out the round ceremonial kivas — and here apparently another type of kiva also — square, and not round.

From these crumbling walls the Old People, the Anasazi,

had come, leaving the rooms where they had lived and worked silent and desolate, leaving those ceremonial chambers with the songs and prayers forever stilled — leaving only questions, unanswered.

And now above the roses and the meadows of the People the quiet house stood, and farther down in the canyon a people who knew the Anasazi only by legend tilled their cornfields and herded their sheep, moving out on the sunlit flats or back again into the rock-walled canyons, as the need for grass or water sent them ...

When word came to Oljato of the new discoveries, Asthon Sosi set forth on horseback with the children to see them. They went first to Navajo Canyon to see Inscription House, and saw the Spanish name and the half-obliterated date, thinking of those early emissaries of their own race who had come into the country of the People and had found there the record of the Anasazi.

Then from Inscription House they stepped abruptly into the problems of their own day. Stopping at a hogan for mutton, they were greeted by an old man. To him Asthon Sosi explained their wishes. He turned to a boy lounging on the sheepskins.

'Go out and get a sheep for Asthon Sosi,' he told him.

The boy did not stir.

'Asthon Sosi wants to buy a mutton. Get it for her,' commanded the old man again.

Still the boy lounged on the sheepskins.

The old man turned to Asthon Sosi.

'He has been away at school. Tell him what you want and he will understand you, perhaps.'

In English Asthon Sosi spoke to him. The boy ignored her. The old man turned to her in despair.

'There, you see what you do to our children. When you get through with them, they are no good to you and no good to us.'

Around then to the Tsegi they went to see the great house above the roses, the house of broken pottery, Kietsiel. Again John Wetherill, Dr. Cummings, and Malcolm Cummings climbed up to the silent cave. Here perhaps was one of the great houses of which the Tachini legend spoke; here was broken pottery enough to justify the name which the People gave to many of the ruins.

Down the canyon again through green meadows they came, passing the great bubbling spring that fed the fields and flocks of Nide-kloi, the Whiskered One. At the fork of the canyon they could see Nide-kloi's hogan above them. An old woman came out and hailed them as they passed.

'Alahane! Ha de sha?' she asked Asthon Sosi in the greeting of the People.

'We have been hunting houses of the Anasazi,' the Slim Woman answered her. 'We have come from a great house of many rooms farther up the canyon.'

The old woman, Nide-kloi's wife, considered this.

'The Anasazi? There is one dead over there,' she told Asthon Sosi. 'My children herding sheep found it. They did not touch it — not even the pottery with it, for it belonged to the Anasazi. But Natani Yazi, the Little Chief, might like to see it.'

Dr. Cummings, the Little Chief, did want to see it. He and John Wetherill and the young people went off at once to see the burial. Asthon Sosi waited, talking to Nide-kloi's wife.

'You are hunting houses of the Old People?' she said

to the Slim Woman. 'There is a house in this other branch of the canyon. It is very large.'

'As large as the one we have seen today — the house of broken pottery up the canyon?'

'Not that large... but still very large,' replied Nide-kloi's wife. 'I have seen it myself, when I went up that side canyon, gathering plants for dye. No white man has been there.'

When the others came back from looking at the burial, Asthon Sosi told them what the old Navajo woman had said. Another house against the rock... almost as large as the one they had seen, and still undiscovered...

They decided to come back to the Tsegi and go up to the great ruin which Nide-kloi's wife had described. But that night they would go down the canyon and camp in the pass as they had planned. Asthon Sosi and the children would return to Oljato, and John would go on a necessary trip to Bluff.

That night John Wetherill and Dr. Cummings made final arrangements for the return to the Tsegi and the investigation of the great ruin. Then they would keep on, hunting the Rock Rainbow, the great natural bridge which the One-Eyed Man of the Salt Clan had described, and to which the Navajos feared to go without their forgotten prayer. New trails, still unexplored by the white man, lay before them. New trails to ancient places.

At Bluff John Wetherill found disturbing news. W. B. Douglass of the General Land Office was there planning a survey of the boundaries of the National Monument which had been established in the Tsegi, planning also a trip to the undiscovered bridge. At the beginning of the season's work he had tried to prevent Dr. Cummings

from getting a permit for excavation; now he planned to halt all excavation under way, and to confiscate any collections made within the boundaries of the National Monument. The result of all the work that had been done in Navajo Canyon and in the Tsegi seemed to Wetherill and Cummings to be threatened.

John Wetherill's job had always been that of a peacemaker. Now he tried to settle the difficulties between the two men. He felt that by presenting the situation to Douglass and showing him that the work was being done scientifically and under university auspices, he might be able to bring the two men into agreement.

But the attempt failed; Wetherill went back to the Tsegi with the disturbing news; and he and Cummings, perturbed, tried to decide what their course of action should be.

John Wetherill still felt that the difficulty might be solved. If the two men could meet face to face and talk it out, could know each other as he knew them both, surely their disagreement could be settled. Both men were now hunting the undiscovered bridge of stone — that Rock Rainbow of which the One-Eyed Man of the Salt Clan had told them. Consolidating the two parties might be the solution.

'If Douglass is a reasonable man — and he must be to hold the position he does — we can straighten all this out in a few minutes,' Wetherill declared. 'We can explain what we are doing; we can show that our work is scientific and under proper direction. Then, since we are both hunting the bridge, we can hunt it together.'

So it was decided. After they went up the canyon to look at the great ruin of which the Navajo woman had

told them, they would not keep on to the bridge as they had planned, but would return to Oljato and wait there for Douglass. Direct council, face to face, would be the simple way, and the way to peace.

From Marsh Pass they set forth, up the Tsegi, between the high red walls to the fork of the canyon. They found Nide-kloi's son-in-law to guide them. He knew the great ruin which his mother-in-law had seen, the ruin in which no white man had set foot.

Then up the side canyon between high red cliffs they rode, back and forth across the steep-sided stream, avoiding quicksand, forging on. Tall spruce stood against the red cliffs above them, and in the canyon was the cool fall of running water...

Up then from the floor of the canyon, climbing higher... Nide-kloi's son-in-law stopped.

'There is the house of the Anasazi,' he said.

Before the astonished eyes of the white men, the red-walled house, hardly distinguishable from the red sandstone cliff behind, clung to the face of the rock. A great house almost as large as that other — Nide-kloi's wife had spoken truly. And in it no white man had set foot.

Fearful of this silent dwelling-place of the dead, the Navajo stayed behind. But on up the steep sides of the canyon climbed John Wetherill and Dr. Cummings and his students.

Suddenly the high arch of the cave was above them, lifting, like the exultation of a song, upward against blue sky.

Separate from that world of present sunlight, they stood in an ancient time. They walked over the roofs of the houses, examining the red sandstone masonry, the adobe

mortar, the wattlework of sticks. Through the low doorways they entered dark rooms sharp with the scent of cliff dwelling rubbish; they looked through the small openings that framed bits of the opposite wall of the canyon, seven hundred yards away. Out again into the shadowed daylight of that high-arched cave they came, counting the rooms. A hundred of them — many filled with rubbish, many with walls crumbling to ruin. A hundred hidden answers to questions so old that the only answers had been in legend.

The women of the Tachini had told their children beside their hogan fires of a people moving: one group from the Mesa Verde to Navajo Mountain and on into this high-walled canyon of the Tsegi; one group from the Canyon de Chelly to the Lukachukai Mountains, and on again to this same Tsegi; and then the two groups coming out again, uniting, going on to Oraibi...

Before them the ruins lay. They looked for the round kivas that had been characteristic of the Mesa Verde ruins, of the ruins around Navajo Mountain, the kivas that they had found again in the re-discovered Kietsiel. Round kivas, in which the ceremonies of an ancient race had been held.

But here they found no such shape. Here all the ceremonial chambers were square. And at Oraibi the village-dwelling Hopis sang and prayed in kivas that were square.

Here on the face of the cliff was the painted figure of the War God with his curved flint knife. Still the People prayed to Nayenezgani, Slayer of the Alien Gods. Still his picture was drawn in sand in the Hochonje, the chant of war against evil spirits. Still he danced in the ceremonies of the Night Chant, that chant which belonged to the Ta-

chini. Still at the end of their silver beads hung his curved flint knife...

Here in this arched cave the rich voice of the wind sounded... Below them Nide-kloi's son-in-law waited...

Back down the Tsegi and out into the pass they went; back again to the trading post at Moonlight Water. There they hoped to find Douglass, and after that go together on the trail to the Rock Rainbow, the rainbow such as the gods had flung across canyons for the footsteps of the People.

At Oljato there was no word from Douglass. Yet, if he and Cummings could be brought together, could go together over this new trail, their differences might be settled.

'We'll wait a day for Douglass,' John Wetherill decided.

The success of their expedition now seemed assured. Nasja-begay, Son of the Owl, had told Asthon Sosi that he had been to the arch not long before. A Paiute, he could go even without the lost prayer. They sent word on ahead for Nasja-begay to meet them at Paiute Canyon to lead them to the bridge.

At the end of the twenty-four hours, Douglass had not reached Oljato. Cummings's time was limited; his university classes would soon begin; the expedition had to go on. Confident of success, they started out on their search for the great natural bridge.

Hardly had they started when a Navajo brought word that a white man was approaching. They made camp and waited for him to overtake them. When Douglass with his party and his two Indian guides came up, the two groups went on together.

Hoping for the solution of the difficulties between the

two leaders, John Wetherill quietly guided them over the hard trail. As co-discoverers of the Rock Rainbow, there would be an equal meed of glory for both.

The Indian guides had not been beyond Bald Rocks and tried to discourage the white men from going farther.

'A white man's horse can't get over,' they said.

'Go on!' ordered John Wetherill.

'This is one trail that no woman will ever take,' remarked Douglass.

Over the domes of bare rock they went on.

'There's no water,' said the Indians.

'Go on!' ordered John Wetherill.

They went on.

At last both Indians confessed themselves completely lost.

'Go on!' repeated John Wetherill quietly.

They went on.

Finally Nasja-begay overtook them and Nasja-begay knew the trail. Nearer and nearer they came to the arch which spanned the canyon like a rainbow.

'Around this bend you'll see the bridge,' Nasja-begay told John Wetherill.

Wetherill passed the word on to Dr. Cummings, and as they rounded the bend of the canyon, Cummings saw the bridge, the first white man to look upon the greatest natural arch of rock known in the world.

This was the rainbow, flung out across the canyon. This was the bridge of which the One-Eyed Man of the Salt Clan had spoken, which Luka, the Laugher of the Reed Clan, had sought and failed to find.

Across the Bald Rocks where white men's horses could not go, past the places where the Navajo guide and the

Paiute guide had both wished to turn back, John Wetherill had pushed on. And now at last, guided by Nasja-begay they had come to the sacred place of the People.

Dr. Cummings pointed out the bridge to Douglass, who spurred on ahead. John Wetherill, faithful to his obligation as Cummings's guide, suggested that he go first on the trail.

'I don't want to be rude,' demurred Cummings.

Wetherill, the first on many trails, made his decision quickly. Here were two men whose antagonism the days on the trail had failed to lessen. More strained still would become their relations if one preceded the other to the Rock Rainbow. Whichever one might be first, the other would lose all credit. If, on the other hand, he, as guide of the combined expedition, led the way himself, the two official leaders would share credit equally.

'Then I'll be rude,' he said.

Spurring on ahead, he passed Douglass at a run. And on August 14, 1909, John Wetherill stood alone beneath the great span of rock, the first white man to reach the Rainbow Bridge.