

The Canyon That Was

[Eliot Porter describes a place that was alive when he saw it. We have lost the tense as it was, even though the canyon never will be again.]

Handwritten: You - I - We - (I find these variations a confusion in forms) 5

Handwritten: 12

Handwritten: serenity, This is a possibility

The architect, the life-giver, and the moderator of Glen Canyon is the Colorado River. It slips along serenely, ~~ruffled~~ only in the few places where boulder-filled narrows confine it, for nearly two hundred miles. *For all the* The first canyon experience is too overwhelming to ~~let you~~ *permeate* in more than the broadest features and boldest strokes. The eye is numbed by vastness and magnificence, and passes over the fine details, ignoring them in a defense against surfeit. The big features, the massive walls and towers, the shimmering vistas, the enveloping ~~presence~~ *all as* of light, ~~are~~ *are all* hypnotizing, shutting off awareness of the particular

Handwritten: later it is possible

But one day you begin to focus on the smaller, more familiar more comprehensible objects which, when finally seen in the context of the whole, are endowed with a wonder no less than the total. It is from them that the greatest rewards come. *They are seen* You begin to see for the first time the velvety lawns of young tamarisks sprouting on the wet sandbars just vacated by the retreating flood, or how the swirling surface of the green, opaque river converts light reflected from rocks and trees and sky into a moire' of interlacing lines and coils of color, or how the festooned designs etched into the walls by water and lichens, evoke in a free imagination scenes of great events, caricatures of life, even the flight of birds. *image of long together*

Handwritten: experience

It is an intimate canyon. The feeling of intimacy comes partly from your being able to travel through it by boat—from a close association at unknown in a canyon seen only from above or dipped into ~~only~~ a few places.

2 *weak*
The intimacy also comes from the calmness and congeniality of the river and the closeness of the walls. Life along the banks and bars is unhurried. Every bend is a good campsite. ^{stars}Clear springs are ^{not far apart} close; their rocks and flowers are good. Evenings can be ~~superb~~—the glow of burnished cliffs, a quiet peace settling on boatmen close by the campfire, subdued voices accentuating the voice of the river, gliding into a night that spreads fast. Stars and a diminished sky dimly silhouetted, the canyon's walls, and there is a security between them. *page 5*

The rocks through which the canyon was carved are old monolithic sandstones *never looked a bit, in places straight for the water* and you need to know three of their names to understand what they are doing. ?

you might think you mean
The Wingate formation at the upper end weathers through vertical cracks, extending down from the surface, into massive, burnt-red, columnar blocks and slabs. When these break off and fall, shattering on the steep, narrow talus bordering the river, they strew the slope with upended, jagged fragments; their faces, like the cliff above, oxidize to a polished purple-black, a dark *thin del* varnish which is deep metallic blue in the shade and dazzling white in the sun. Downstream ~~the river~~ the Wingate formation drops out of sight below the many-layered ~~Kayenta formation~~. *in dark places* Its place is taken by Navajo sandstone, and the character of the cliffs changes strikingly. The plateau weathers into rounded domes, and the rim ~~curves~~ *Wab. has* *curving to the face of the cliff*. Ephemeral streams have streaked the walls with ribbons of color that cling like wet tapestries. The dark stains *caused by* are the algae and lichens that manage to grow in the occasional films of moisture; the bluish-white bands ~~xxx~~ *have been* mark where chemicals ~~leached~~ from the sandstone. Where water seeps through cracks or where springs flow, there are caves green with tangles of rank vegetation.

Archives

The Navajo sandstone cleaves to produce immense arches and bays and all manner of rippled and shell-like structures. Slabs spall off the cliffs from time to time, one layer after another. The fresh scars and those of great antiquity combine to shape and blot out the tapestries. High on the face of the canyon walls in many places, like the pupilless eyes of marble statues, huge lenticular depressions have flaked out—the beginnings of caves, in which water oozes out along the fracture lines ~~supports~~. If the caves are shaded, they contain a heavy growth of maidenhair fern and mimulus.

Scars both fresh and ancient
See pg 4
pg 4

The tributaries of Glen Canyon are a unique natural museum exhibiting examples of erosion found nowhere else in the world. The walls of the canyon as a whole are like worm-eaten wood, riddled with tunnels on an enormous scale. ~~The smooth bores of their unroofed, twisting holes converge~~ *These are greater* on the common river channel. Most of them are quite short, no more than a mile in length, the shortest snaking back only two or three turns before ending abruptly in a circular chamber surrounding a pool into which a trickle *greater* may descend ~~through a sculptured channel in the roof.~~ *slit in the roof...*

you have removed the human touch

The similarity of the tributary ground plans shows that the same forces were at work molding them. Their courses are S-curves twisting back into the sandstone of the Colorado Plateau. Some straighten out as they advance ~~headward~~ *Fifty-seven turns*, but others twist for miles back from the river, Twilight Canyon still has not ended, nor has the height of its walls lessened. It and several other canyons are dry and dead; nothing grows among heaped-up boulders except perhaps for a wisp of green high enough above one or two of the inside ~~corners to miss the minor floods.~~ *from water underground* No flowers spring from the barren walls, and no water shows, unless it is deeply shaded under a massively undercut wall. Such a canyon is no place to be caught in a flash flood.

pg 10

notes blend, hang in the air for a while, then fade. You are ready to believe that the light itself is echoing and re-echoing the way the sound does. Of all the phenomena of the side canyons, it is the light, even in the farthest depths of the narrowest canyon, that evokes the ultimate in awe. There are in

somber, rocky caverns of purple and ocher stone into which the sun rarely strikes, shallow pools glitter in brass from sunlit cliffs high overhead.

Wherever there is a damp cleft, maidenhair fern and scarlet lobelia and white columbine grow. They reflect a dusky cyan-green in the blue shadows, their drooping leaves imparting a subdued, almost funereal atmosphere. It is reflection that is the magic essence of the waters of the Glen Canyon and its tributaries. You may find reflections first in the slowly evaporating

pools on some of the rounded floors--pools that never quite become dry because they are fed by seeping water. Others are replenished from time to time by storms. All the pools, each rill, the individual sheets of flowing water, every wet rock and seep--these mirror with enameled luster the world

about. In narrow chasms streams of melted gems flow over purple sand past banks of verdant willow. Small tarns mix the colors of pink rocks and cerulean sky, and wet ripples of mud may do the same thing. Nothing remains

the same from year to year. Flood and drouth, heat and cold, life and death alter but they leave unchanged the grand plan, the essence of the Colorado's masterwork.

One kind of change now occurring will obliterate all the places that mean most, wiping them out for all foreseeable time. With nothing tangible to evoke the past, even the memory of the river's history will go. This last and final act of obliteration is, as it was with Colorado River gold-seekers fifty years ago, materially motivated. The wealth of the river this time is its power, ostensibly at least, although there are those who see a less forthright purpose--the ambition of a federal bureau to build an

empire out of river development, with sincere regard, no doubt, for one kind of public welfare, but with an unknowing disregard of many less tangible aspects of human well-being.

It is self-evident that a long-term need exists for something more than material benefits. But ^{public} effort seems increasingly to be determined by men whose key criterion is short-term economic feasibility, a standard that can measure neither spirit nor beauty. Glen Canyon dam may appear to exemplify this standard. But neither does its imposing magnitude alone justify it, nor can the dam serve all the beneficial functions attributed to it in the process of obtaining legislative support or as a subsequent apology. What it ~~does to beauty is tragic.~~

The waters impounded by this plug of artificial stone will spread back through Glen Canyon for its entire one hundred and eighty-six miles, inundating the sparkling river, swallowing its luminous cliffs and tapestried walls, and extinguishing far into the long, dim, distant future everything that ~~made~~ ^{gave it life.} it live. As the waters creep into the side canyons, enveloping one by one their mirroring pools, drowning their bright flowers, backing up their clear, sweet springs with stale flood water, a fine opaque silt ~~will~~ ^{will} settle over all, covering rocks and trees alike with a gray slimy ooze.

Darkness pervades the canyons. Death and the thickening, umbrageous gloom take over a place where the living river and shimmering light were the glory. ^{the river} ^{too fast} ^{like}

* * * * *

Before the bureau chose drastically to change what was there, Glen Canyon was a place to remember, and I remember these things lost:

The Glen Canyon trench is a microcosm ~~xxx~~ separated from the world in its depth, in its atmosphere, and in its living things.

as well as in its ~~depth~~ by its bounding desert borders.

2
is it?
Its wind is its own, born of high temperatures and steep rocky
defiles. ~~It comes~~ puffing up the canyon, stirring up the sand into smoky
plumes and graying the water. "floating downstream against ~~it~~ ^{the}, even with
the help of a motor, ~~is a snail's~~ ^{slow to} pace. When ~~it makes~~ ^{it makes} the spray fly, the
heat of the day is tempered so suddenly and chillingly that you seek the
sunny side of the river. Around the next bend, if the wind is quiet, the
heat settles down as before, and you wish for shade.

So do most of Glen Canyon's forms of life. Its vegetation has been
reproducing for centuries, most of the species probably arriving from the
outside world by way of the river. Its animals, too, are isolated, a few having
developed their own races in the flow of evolutionary processes within the
restricted canyon environment. The birds are the most conspicuous. It
is their nature to live conspicuous lives—they fly, and in the daytime.

Two much the Poy for
al They advertise their presence by song, even when they seem to be skulking
in the thickets. In the spring the willow and tamarisk jungles of the
river's edge ring with the cheerful sibilance of yellow warblers. From among
the broken rocks of dry talus comes the bright chant of the rock wren, and
echoing ~~from higher up~~ ^{from} the cliff side, the canyon wren's deliberate down-scale
notes. ~~Echo melodious~~ Added to these sweet songs, there are some unmelodious, comic sounds
issuing frequently from the thickets—the harsh clucking, cawing, and
whistling of the yellow-breasted chat that lurks mostly unseen in the densest
underbrush but occasionally bursts from the top of a bush in awkward, wing-
clapping, nuptial flight.

with their four-toed prints

Great blue herons mark ~~the muddy edge of the river; their four-toed~~
~~prints~~ border every lagoon and shallow backwash, where ~~the~~ herons have stood
motionless watching for small fish or frogs. ^{As}approached too closely, they
rise smoothly, legs dangling, their powerful wings beating slowly in
unhurried flight down the river.

In the side canyons, along the narrow water courses where deep pools
are carved in rock and the flow is clear and constant, lives a small, plump,
gray bird with ^astumpy tail, the water ouzel. He is truly aquatic, and
although not web-footed he is as much at home in the water as a duck. He
makes his living in the flowing streams and cascades of ^{the} high ^{creeks}basins and
canyons of the west; he cannot live without them and he never departs far ^{from them}.

Differ from other ouzels and when well in all probability he builds
He builds his roofed nest and rears his young in the spray of waterfalls. *As in the*
You will probably first encounter him ~~as he bobs on a stone in midstream.~~ *and you*

must be near
He ~~may~~ astonish you by suddenly plunging into the foaming water. ^{use for 15} Over his
somber dark gray suit he instantly slips ^{it} a resplendent jacket of ^{shiny} silver
^{rather soft} bubbles and walks about on the bottom picking up aquatic larvae here and
^{as little} there with the same ^{as he would}unconcern an ordinary bird would show on dry land. In

a moment he pops out again, leaving his bright diving suit behind, and as
dry as before he dove in, continues about his business. He is apparently
pleased with his mode of life, bursting into song most unexpectedly after
emerging from one of his underwater ^{trips}expeditions. ~~There are technologists~~

He ~~who allege that birds sing merely to proclaim territorial right. But the ouzel~~
sings his ebullient, varied song throughout the year for no other assignable
reason than the sheer joy of doing so. ^{for} He himself ^{has} is the only audience he
~~requires, for more often than not~~ ^{when} he sings unheard in the mist of a
thundering cascade.

absolutely out

To the murmuring and ^{voice of}chattering by the river, the raven's harsh caw is added now and then from ^{about here or there}a point in the sky where he balances the law of gravity with the law of convection. He hangs there, rocking slightly as ^{he}he ~~seeks~~ ^{seems to} seeks out the rising air, his black profile punctuating a voice—a voice that fits peculiarly well the stony world in which he lives. He is a bird of parts, neither showing off nor shrinking. He saves a particular quality in his voice for special occasions, and though he cannot sing what we call song, ~~xxx~~ he is able to introduce a bell-like quality into his caw which is music without melody. He ~~does not live to exist, but~~ ^{seems to} to enjoy—especially to delight in his greatest accomplishment—flight. A small group may spend hours playing in the air currents, soaring effortlessly, chasing one another in an endless game, ~~diving, chasing, swooping,~~ wing on wing, turning upside down in a wild exuberant melee, racing past the face of a cliff, feeling desperately for the upsurge that will give an advantage, uttering guttural cries that release all the pent-up excitement just as ^{out}children cry in their play. ^{when can they not}I think this is an expression of joy. The very place incites it.

don't need
see p 17

I feel it ^{when, on the first morning,} when I turn in my sleeping bag toward the east. A faint light is just perceptible, and it soon will give way to the waxing twilight of morning and the world will fill with color. This is a positive time, a time of expansion and increase and expectation. In the waning twilight of evening everything is closing down and in retreat, but at dawn each moment is brighter; the path into light, into activity, is full of hope and ^{promise and} renewed energy and the promise of clarity. The sun, still a long way beneath

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cut final
keep pale?

the rim, routs the last stars down the brightening sky. They make a ~~final~~ pale stand in the thinning shadow of the earth, ~~until~~ Venus alone holds out, resisting the stampede. Directly overhead fleecy clouds sail from the northwest across the narrow, rock-enclosed sky, preserving the order of their ranks while their shapes shift and flow. A tinge of pink is spreading over them, changing gradually to salmon and then to yellow, when suddenly from some notch in the horizon the sun bursts into this hemisphere. It lights the top of a butte, transforming it into a metallic crown. Slowly, the color slips down its sides, copperplating them and enveloping the canyon in warmth. The river picks up the color and multiplies it. Gray stones along its muddy bank are uncut lapis lazuli embedded in molten bronze. Blue highlights thread the dry sand ripples. Day is near and earth will soon turn it into the canyon depths.

The advance is swift. Purple banks and blue dunes become common mud and sand, the morning colors revert, the river becomes muddy green, the rocks turn to brick and clay, and the sun appears above the canyon rim.

We have had our breakfast, pack our few possessions, and are ready to shove off into the current lapping at the loaded boats. We check the sands again for forgotten objects, postponing the final moment, loath to depart the little world/for a night's stop was the focus of our lives in an eternity of timeless existence. We push the boat out, wading knee deep in mud to gain the deeper water before climbing on board. The day is bright and still. No wind ruffles the river—glass, lined with swirling striae, where the current is upswelling. The sandstone cliffs are distorted near the boat, but down the river's reach they are nearly perfect. In the winding canyon dark and light

how - no reference to
reflections, meaning unclear.

reflections replace one another in slow succession. The gentle wake of the boat breaks these images into undulating spots and patches. Each wave for a moment holds a fragment of sky mixed with golden globules of sunlit rock.

before
20
The striped walls
The walls pass in review, and the breaks in their defenses pass by too, some of them in striped cliffs undercut by the river. No talus, not even a sand bank or bar, separate them from the water, and the cliffs are sliced unexpectedly by narrow perpendicular slots. At high water the river deposits its load in them, ^{dripping} sand, in the eddies at the entrances and the finer sediments precipitating in the quietest waters. Back in the slots, these fingers of the river blend into a bank of gray ooze which thickens ~~without detectible discontinuity~~ into a slippery bed of clay of uncertain depth extending from wall to wall. After the spring run-off has subsided and the river withdrawn, these slots are left plugged to their mouths with mud and silt that dries slowly to a cracked, crusted surface you can walk on. But the first local freshet will wash it all out until the next high water.

Like the half-concealed passages into long forgotten tombs, these narrow slots give no hint of the strange sights inside their portals. We plunge apprehensively into the mud and water. Sometimes it is waist-deep; sometimes we have to swim. We struggle through the sucking clay, one laborious step at a time, to higher and harder ground where we make our way within, unimpeded.

In Mystery Canyon, after traversing a winding corridor of tangled woodbine gardens, we find ourselves at last in a circular arena, confronted by overhanging, inaccessible walls. Dark viridescent lumps of moss dot the surface and, trembling in a perpetual current of air, green fern tenacles

grow around them from the slippery rock. From a sculptured groove at a higher level a thin stream slides into a black and fathomless pond. The whole interior of this tenebrous chamber, with blindly waving greenery lining its sides, is like the ciliated cavity of an exquisite anemone.

In Cathedral Canyon, beyond a series of immense, vaulted bends, we come to a sudden closing in of the walls where the floor disappears into a water-filled trough no wider than a man's body. Swimming through it is a dreamlike adventure. Shivering we glide along like seals, chin deep in the water, through still depths into an inscrutable solitude. Only the hollow sound of our slight splashing reverberates along the contorted channel back into the stony labyrinth. Now and then, the mysterious bottom, a stone or a graveled ledge, as it rises to surprise us. We climb over wedged boulders from one ribbon pool to another in a journey reminiscent of Xanadu, through caverns measureless to man, with walls and towers girdled round. A sudden shaft of sun, giving a dimension of reality, penetrates the upper stories through an unseen window. It lights a strip of wall with a dazzling yellow and is reflected to our eyes at water level where it meets the pool laps the rock in gentle undulations; golden threads reaching ahead to delineate for a moment the waving separation of water and stone. At last, at the end, is a wisp of a waterfall from unseen heights overhead, slipping over a smooth and algaed chute into a slatey pool. Shivering, we retrace our way, glad to emerge at last into the August sun.

Little Arch, we discover, is a short canyon, ending in a waterfall up which an earlier explorer cut shallow steps in the wet sandstone. We

follow these and are led through pools of a tortured, narrow trough into a roofed room in the ochreous rock. It is dry on one side where a sand bank is heaped up; the other side extends a few feet into a moist alcove giving egress—through a chimney leading straight up to the sky—to the free air of the plateau high overhead. The sides of the chimney have been ground into concave plaques lying one above the other like immense, elongated scales. An ^{Inter}no^{light} ^{light} spreads down this tube and suffuses the chamber, ^{turn}dying our faces and ^{body}bodies a dull furnace red. Our imaginations, turning to the violent events that ^{at}much periodically take place in this cavern, picture the enveloping spray and hear the roar of water as it pours down the chimney in a tumultuous, thundering rush. Our imaginations relaxed when we remembered that the weather outside was good, and the sky cloudless.

Weather in the canyon country is not always ^{that} good. Storms sweep over it from the northwest, the outriggers of disturbances ^{appearing} down from the Aleutians, and ~~they~~ ^{that} may last for a week, enveloping the canyon in mist and rain. More usually, ^{is bad}summer weather is local and short-lived. Storms develop ^{page 23} over the bordering plateaus, spreading out over the encircling land until darkening thunderheads rumble their warning. Down in the canyon, where the ^{very is indicated they come very quickly} cliff-edged sky is narrow, they can surprise you. A white-edged, black cloud rises above the canyon rim, lightning flickers, ^{a flash of lightning} a crash ricochets down the canyon, ^{may be the first warning} and the first drops spatter dark wet rings ^{and} on the hot red sandstone. ^{then} They ^{large} evaporate quickly but their replacements come fast. ^{and} A dusty ~~smell~~ pervades the hot air. The rain curves into the canyon in gusts, ^{page 23} bright points and streaks against dark cliffs. The drops ^{included} seem to float down

but they strike the face hard. The black cloud now ^{occupies} possesses the entire opening of sky and a cold, chilling wind sweeps through the canyon.

Another flash of lightning brightens the obscurity and thunder crashes again, much louder, reverberating from higher terraces, rolling and rumbling up and down the gorge, ^{and} dying in the cul de sacs. The rain comes down hard now.

The wet cliffs have lost all color, but glisten from the sheets of water pouring over them. ^{the new summer rilled with masonry} Through the notches and dips in the rim, wherever the walls were streaked, streams pour down; thin bands of wetness follow the stripes of oxidation down the cliffs. Through larger notches torrents spume over, free-falling hundreds of feet with a roar, some white and clean, others brown and opaque, ^{with redness} all of them ^{See line 28} drowning out the thunder. ¶ The downpour retreats

as quickly as it came. The waterfalls diminish, cease, and the sun comes out again. The rocks lose their wet sheen, ^{dry off} only a few puddles lingering. ^{done} We and ^{so full then both out in canyon}

^{at} the trees glitter, drip briefly, and dry off. ^{let} The creek, roiled and full, ^{has been so full and in the last to return to its former peaceful form} is the last to forget the storm. Before long the internal warmth from food and the external warmth from sun has exorcised all residues of misery. We move on into the day, living, as all good river travelers should, in the present.

out of context and therefore
unconvincing
Should end with a condensation of
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no
may be
to lose?