BEYOND THE CLAY HILLS

An Account of the National Geographic Society's Reconnaissance of a Previously Unexplored Section in Utah

By Neil M. Judd

Leader of the National Geographic Society's Pueblo Bonito Expeditions

AMONG my fellow-members of the National Geographic Society there are very few, I fancy, who have even thought of the possibility that these United States of the 20th century may have escaped thorough exploration; yet the fact remains that areas still exist—relatively small areas when compared with their parent States—about which little or nothing is definitely known. They remained in hiding when "the last frontier" was pushed westward into the Pacific.

Such neglected areas require no second Lewis and Clark Expedition. Their conquest would seem as child's play to those mountain men who trailed through the Rockies over one hundred years ago, or to those pioneers who braved the unknown in the late forties, seeking new homes on the Oregon and California coasts. Kit Carson lived to watch the Old West fade into the dust of endless immigrant trains; Jim Bridger retired to his little farm near Taos, New Mexico, about 1832 because the Great Interior Basin had become too thickly populated and trapping was no longer worth the effort.

The latest United States map* embodies a wealth of diverse information garnered from sundry sources. It pictures winding blue rivers and the red threads of a vast interlocking network of railroads and interurban lines; it locates cities, towns, and mere filling stations; it traces transcontinental highways and many local roads that are utterly impassable following the midsummer rains, and it also discloses to the searching eye certain isolated districts that exhibit none of those symbols which denote the passing of man on his conquests.

For the most part, these latter districts were left bare simply because the mapmaker could obtain no reliable information with which to relieve their bareness; they are, with few exceptions, areas which have never supported a surveyor's transit—areas which are still practically unknown and unexplored.

AN UNKNOWN LAND IN THE HEART OF OUR SOUTHWEST

One such area borders the Rio Colorado in Utah. East and west from this savage red river unmapped mesas stretch away mile after barren mile to green mountains, overtopping an endless distance of pink and white and brown sandstone. Through these thousand-foot layers of solid rock tireless streams have carved for eons, each widening and deepening its pathway to the sea. And man in his wanderings has occasionally followed these same paths, avoiding the blistered table-lands between.

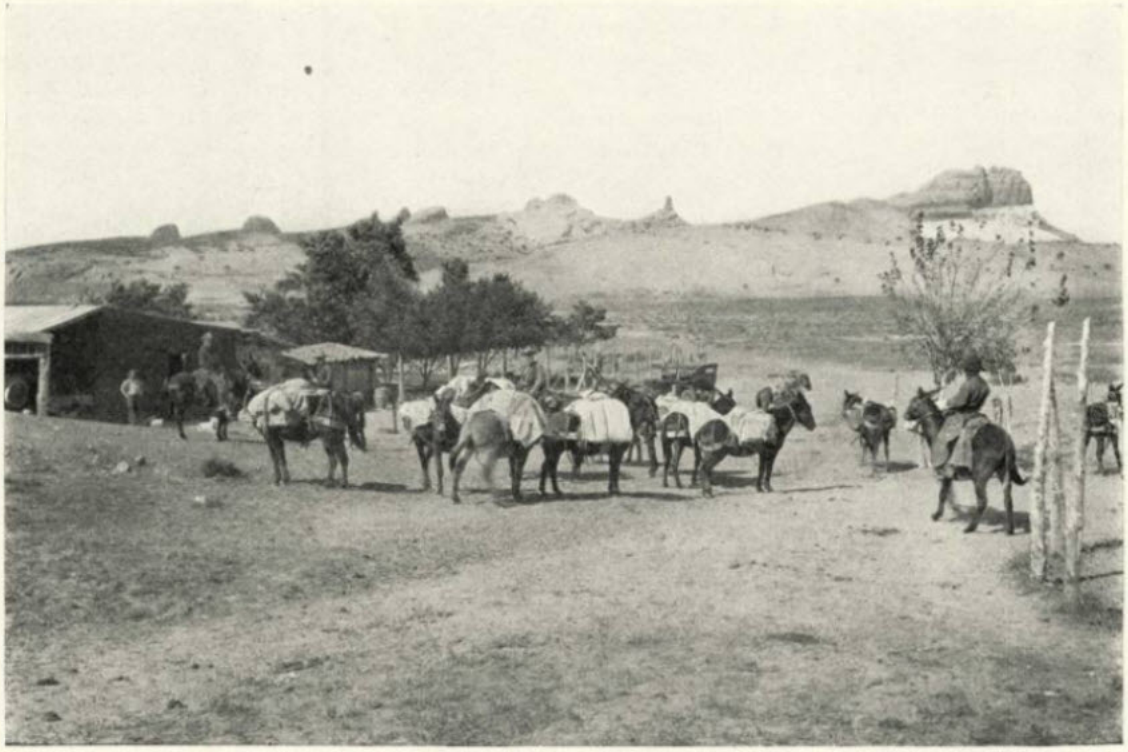
Securely guarded by the deep gorges of the Rio San Juan and the Colorado lies the least-known section, perhaps, of this gigantic rock-floored region. It remains a veritable *terra incognita*. A few adventurers have brushed its more accessible corners, for we find their rusted camp kettles and hear indirect tales of their comings or goings, but they left no permanent record of their individual journeys to aid the topographer or the historian.

Because of the mystery wrapped about it; because, seemingly, it had been so purposely avoided; because all trails led around and none through it, this particular region, nestling in the elbow of the great Colorado, held a peculiar fascination for me. Back in 1907, while searching

* "United States of America," in five colors, published by the National Geographic Society as a map supplement with the National Geographic Magazine for April, 1923. Size, 38 x 28 inches. Additional copies, paper, $1.00; linen, $1.50.

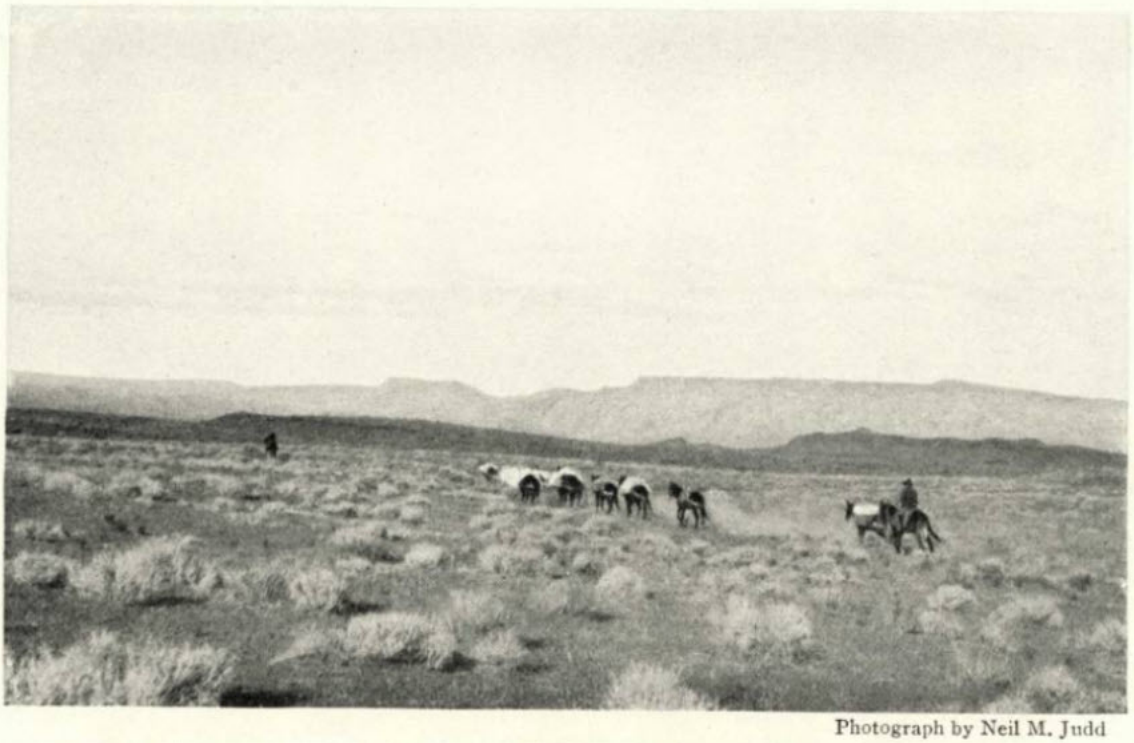
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVES READY FOR THE START FOR KAYENTA

George B. Martin, Edwin L. Wisherd, and the writer, as they left Gallup, New Mexico, for Kayenta, outfitting point for the San Juan Expedition.



Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

THE EXPEDITION'S PACK-TRAIN LEAVING KAYENTA



Photograph by Neil M. Judd

DESERT TRAILS ARE OFTEN LONG AND WEARY, WITH THE HORIZON SEEMINGLY FIXED IN ITS DISTANCE

the shadows of White Canyon for footprints of the ancient cliff-dwellers, I had gazed southward across its silent, shimmering expanse. Again, in 1909, accompanying Dean Byron Cummings to the discovery of the incomparable Rainbow Natural Bridge* (see pages 298 and 299), this same untamed district, when viewed from the gray slopes of Navajo Mountain, had lost none of its inherent mystery and charm.

AGREES TO CARRY THE SOCIETY'S BANNER ALONG UNTRODDEN TRAILS

Still a decade later, from ridges that neighbor Kaiparowits Plateau and the Circle Cliffs, far to the west, that siren something which tempts desert pilgrims from their appointed way beckoned me toward the grim silence and the elusiveness of this unknown canyon country. The desert possesses an impelling force—an indescribable force, infinitely magnified with greater distance and isolation from the usual haunts of men.

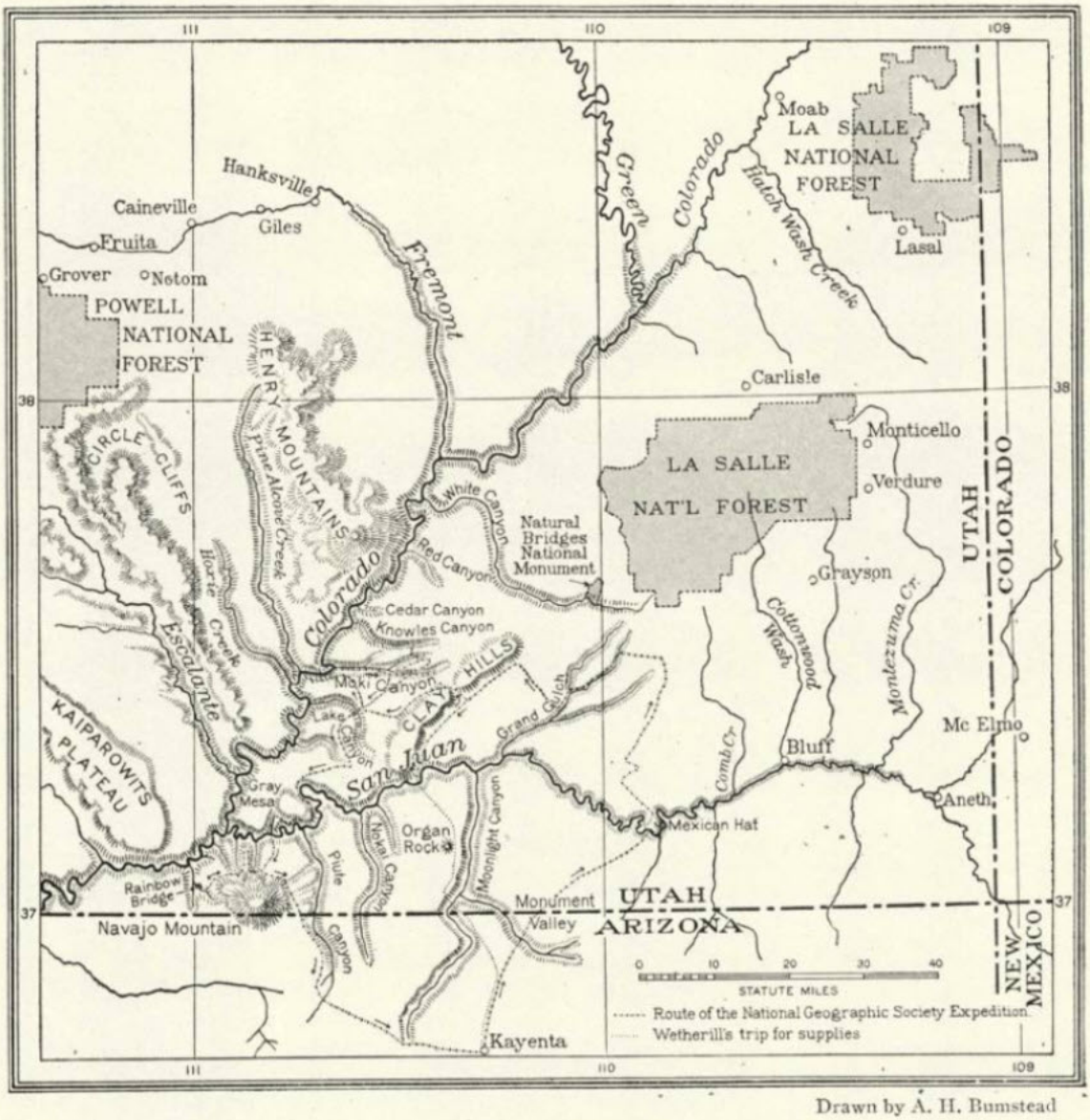
So it was with a strange mingling of secret satisfaction and dubiousness that I accepted the National Geographic Society's recent invitation to carry its banner yet farther along untrodden trails.

This unfrequented section in the angle of the Colorado and San Juan rivers boasts one upstanding landmark, the Clay Hills. Viewed from the south and east, the Clay Hills rise as an unscalable barrier of blue and gray shales and sheer sandstone cliffs. A single narrow gateway leads through and beyond this barrier.

From their cedar-crowned heights the Clay Hills slope gently down to the west, where lies the invisible gorge of the Rio Colorado; thence miles of pale yellow sand lift themselves slowly to meet a skyband of far-away cliffs, dimly purple through the distance. It is indeed a wild country and lonesome. Its very wildness adds to its solitude, as the latter emphasizes its awful vastness.

Here, in an area larger than the State of Connecticut, there resides no living soul. The silence hangs heavily. Roving, four-footed beasts of the desert are

* See, in the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE, "The Great Natural Bridges of Utah," by Byron Cummings, February, 1910; "The Great Rainbow Natural Bridge of Southern Utah," by Joseph E. Pogue, November, 1911, and "Encircling Navajo Mountain With a Pack-Train—a New Route to Rainbow Natural Bridge," by Charles L. Bernheimer, February, 1923.



Drawn by A. H. Bumstead

A SKETCH MAP SHOWING THE ROUTE OF THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY'S SAN JUAN EXPEDITION

rarely seen; yet their tracks, printed sparingly in the sand, recount the world-old story of the survival of the fittest—a soft-padded night prowler has found its prey and won an easy victory.

Even the birds seem to have deserted this strange country, for one sees but few, other than those noisy jays of the cedar ridges and the buzzards, circling ceaselessly in a turquoise sky.

MORMONS ONCE CROSSED THE REGION

Nearly half a century ago a band of Mormon colonists, guided by Piute Indians, who were later disowned, cut a bold path from western Utah, across the Rio Colorado and the Clay Hill divide, to the founding of Bluff. Descendants of the cattle these pioneers drove now forage the more favored uplands for an uncertain existence, but no trails lead westward into the deeper, more forbidding canyons.

Seekers after gold and, but recently, Government engineers have followed in the way of the indefatigable Powell, braving the whirlpools and rapids of the Colorado, climbing from its dark waters into the gaping mouths of its larger tributaries. But each had his own particular mission and did not wander far afield.

Our unexplored desert areas are savage, cruel, and unmerciful, however

Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

SHIFTING YELLOW AND ORANGE-COLORED SANDS IN MONUMENT VALLEY

Against a background of red cliffs and purple shadows, an Indian, in the middle distance, is resting on the trail across the dunes.

warmly they seem to welcome the newcomer. A single human life is as a grain of wind-blown sand—it comes, rests awhile, drifts on. And often, no doubt, the desert gods smile knowingly with each such passing.

At a San Juan ford some seventeen years ago I met a grizzled prospector with an unhurried burro, bound for the Henry Mountains. The Government maps he carried were recent and encouraged him, because they represented neither intervening hills nor valleys, to believe that his trail was an easy one, with no obstacles other than the Colorado itself.

Neither the old man nor his diminutive mule was ever seen again; both were sacrificed on the altar of those insatiable forces that rule the open spaces.

ONCE THE HOME OF PREHISTORIC PEOPLES

But, however deserted and silent this untamed country may seem to us, there was a time, uncounted centuries ago, when human voices echoed through the dark recesses of the canyons; when sandaled feet stalked deer and mountain sheep along their rocky rims. The crumbling walls of crude stone dwellings, blending chameleon-like with the variegated colors of the cliffs against which they cling, mark the temporary homes of prehistoric peoples.

Fragments of ancient pottery and flint chips discarded by the arrow-maker snap under foot as one climbs the talus to some yawning cave. And there, in the cool shadows, one observes the scattered ashes of former camp fires, the angular wall drawings of primitive artists (see illustration, page 290), and daubs of mud thrown against a cavern roof by children at play.

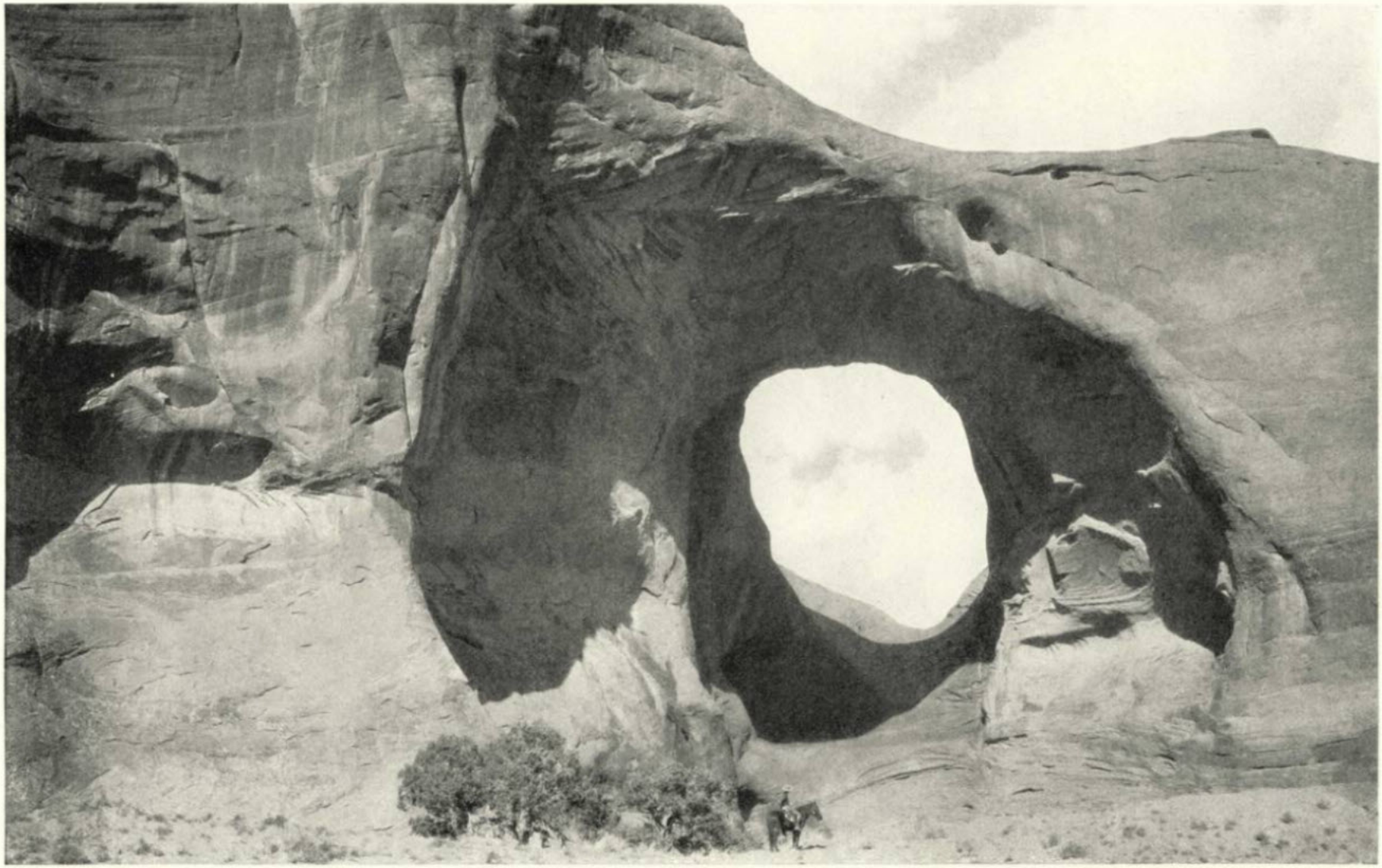
These ancient folk, safely cloistered in murky canyons, tarried but a short while; then moved on to a happier environment. Perhaps they, too, felt the crushing power of this lonesome land!

To neighboring Indians of to-day the uninhabited region west of the Clay Hills is a fearful place, the home of all-powerful, unseen forces. With the mountain sheep gone and the deer fast disappearing, few Navajo can be induced to venture

Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

MONUMENT VALLEY, PLAYGROUND OF THE DESERT GODS

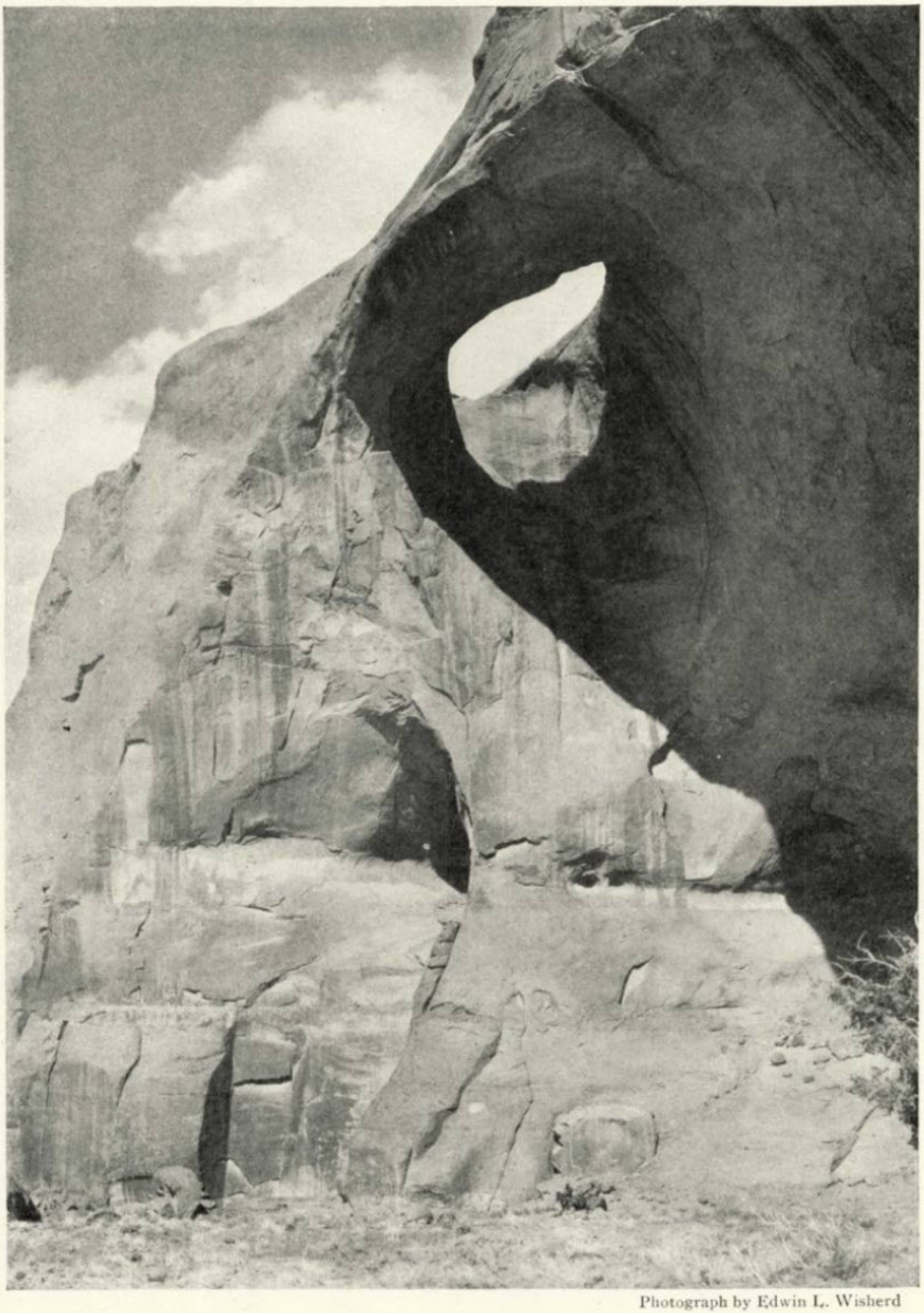
Here man is made to feel his comparative insignificance. Note the rider on the cliff in the middle foreground.



Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

WIND-BLOWN SAND HAS BEEN THE SCULPTOR AND TUNNEL BUILDER HERE: MONUMENT VALLEY, NORTHERN ARIZONA

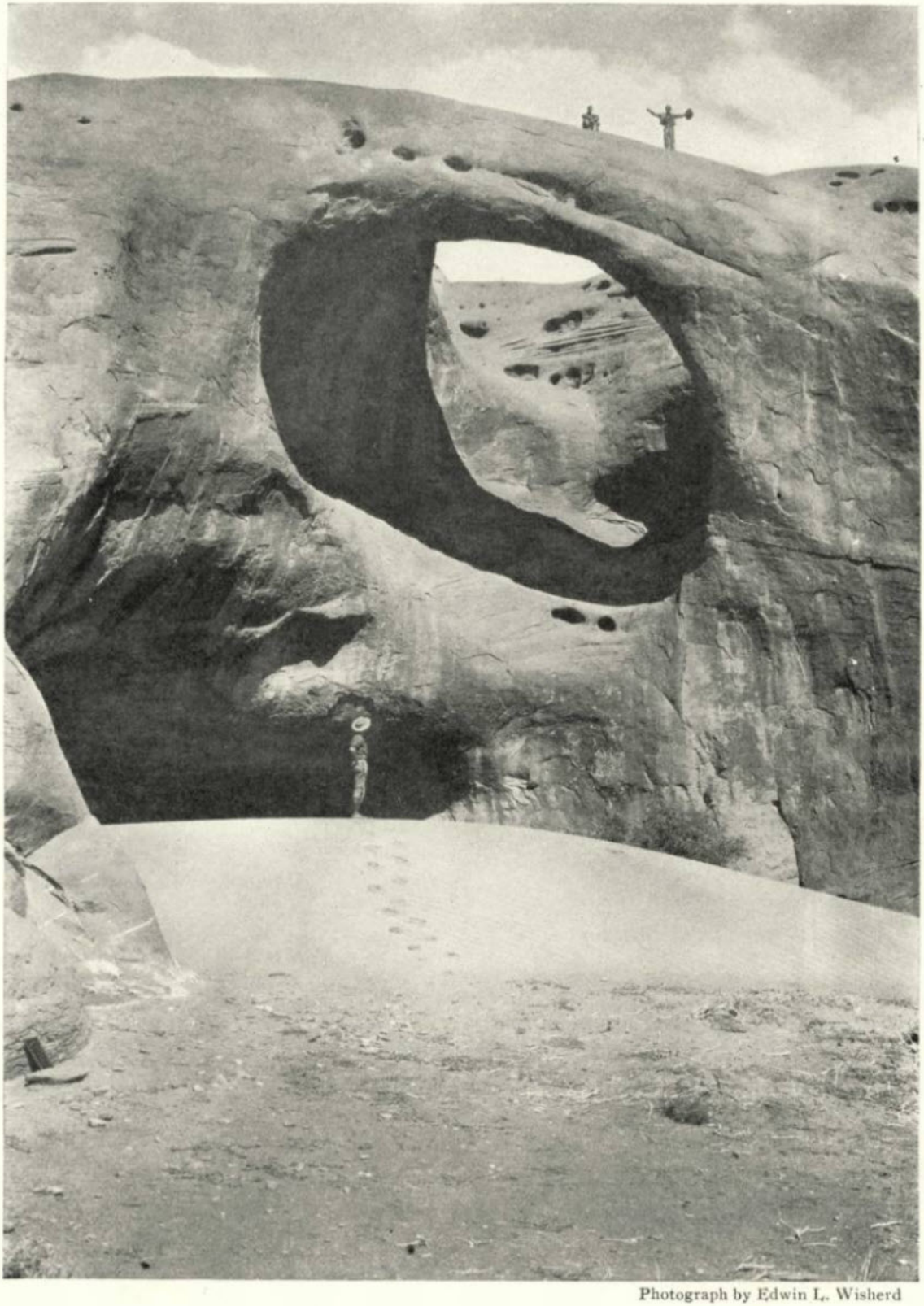
In the land of the red rocks one finds many weird fancies to excite one's wonder and increase one's awe (see also illustrations on pages 282 and 283).



Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

WIND AND SAND AND WATER HAVE JOINED FORCES IN AN EFFORT TO BREAK DOWN THE STONE BARRIERS SURROUNDING MONUMENT VALLEY

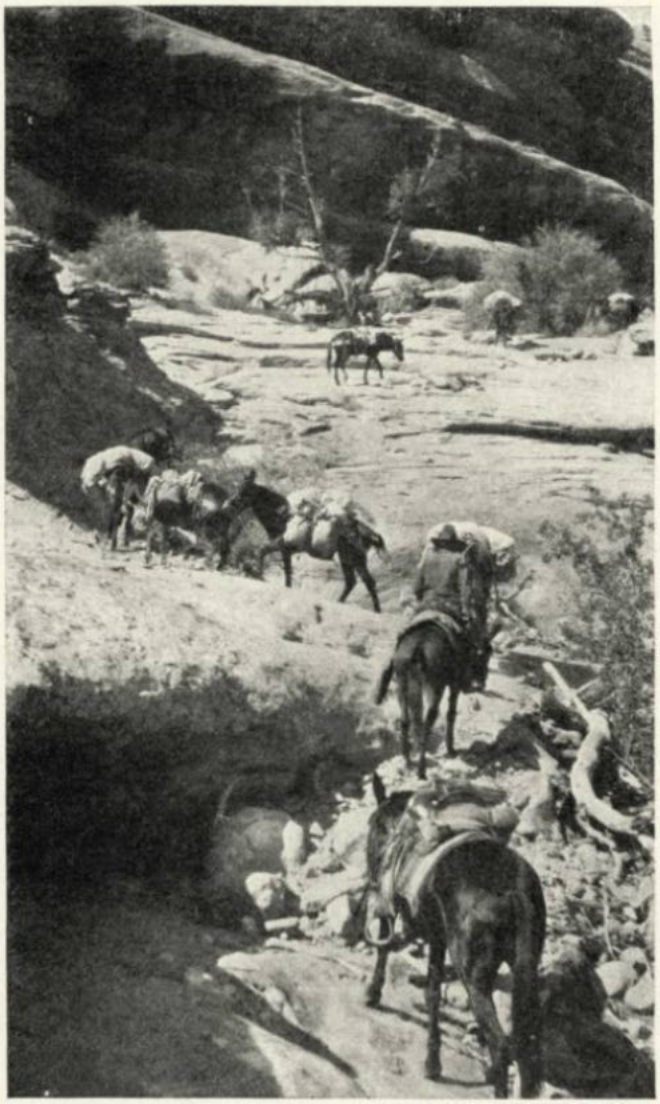
(SEE MAP, PAGE 278)



Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

CARRIED ON THE BREATH OF CEASELESS WINDS, THE FINE YELLOW SAND CARVES STRANGE WINDOWS IN THE RED WALLS OF MONUMENT VALLEY

(SEE ALSO PAGE 279)



Photograph by Neil M. Judd

THE EXPEDITION'S PACK-TRAIN IN GRAND GULCH
(SEE ALSO PAGE 285)

north of the Rio San Juan. The old warrior who was to have accompanied us on the reconnaissance slipped away to hide among the tall rocks on the very eve of our departure; a second Navajo failed to overtake our party on the trail, as he had promised to do.

FLOOD WATERS NECESSITATE DETOUR BY THE EXPEDITION

When we left Kayenta, early last October, the Arizona sands were still soaked with unseasonable and most unwelcome rains. Flood waters were racing down the San Juan. To have attempted to swim the river, as we had planned to do, would have been the height of folly. So we cut the number of our pack-mules to twelve, loaded seven of them with oats, and started for the swinging bridge near Mexican Hat. Because canyon trails are sometimes rough and accidents do happen, one extra mule was included in the train.

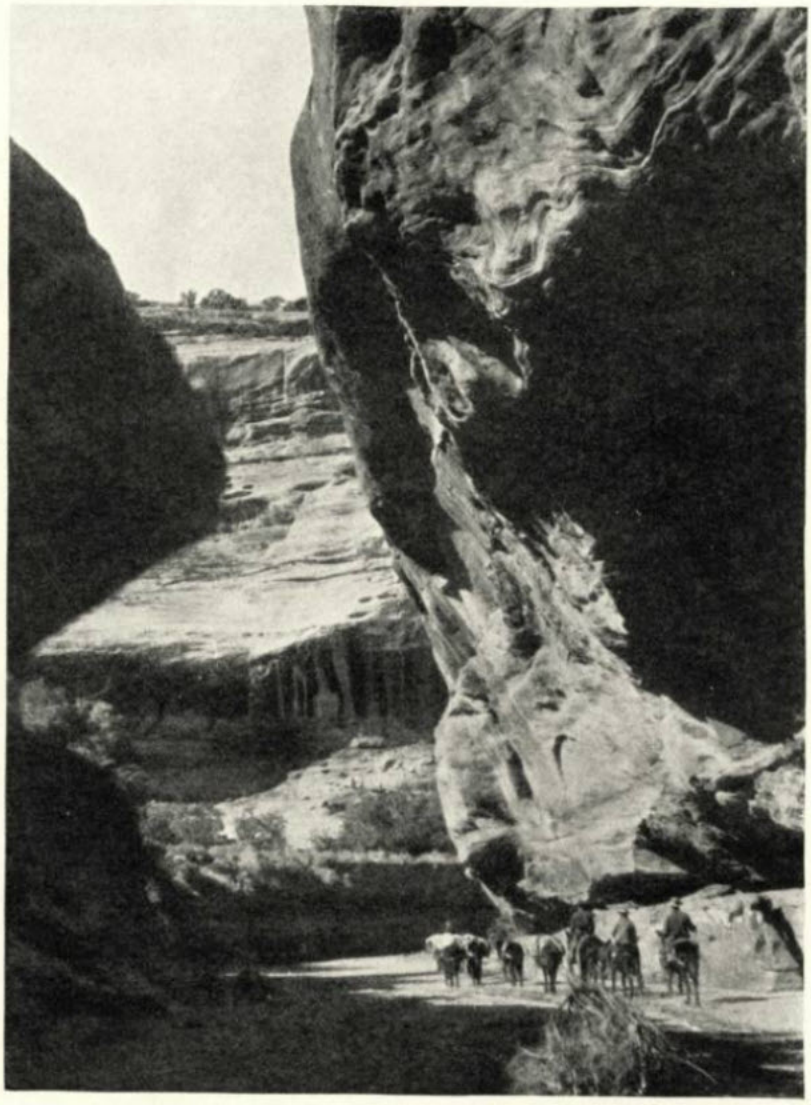
Four mules carried just enough rice and flour and coffee and bacon to assure each of us two meals a day for thirty days; and, since the law of brute force rules that strength shall prevail, it was mutually understood that that member of the party too ill at any time to reach for his biscuit and bowl of rice would find himself in an unfortunate predicament, to say the least. There was to be no breakfast in bed on this trip!

Among all the dude parties that have fared forth from Kayenta, none, perhaps, was so thoroughly mulified as ours. There were twelve pack-mules, biting and kicking and jockeying for position as loaded mules always will do when leaving the home corrals. Then there were four of us, and each sat astride a mule of untested individual habits, with shoulders hunched against a cold, drizzling rain that added nothing of joy to the early miles of our prospective journey.

Out in front, leading the pack-train, rode John Wetherill, guide extraordinary and master of the whole plateau country. Wetherill and I had ridden the desert trails together on other occasions, and I knew the mettle of the man. Where he started, there he went, if humanly possible to do so. And we were starting from Kayenta for a little ride beyond the Clay Hills, where few, if any, had ridden before (see map, page 278).

Forced from our intended path by unexpected floods, we trailed through Monument Valley, playground of the desert gods, and across endless mesas to the Rio San Juan. Even in October the valley was oppressively hot, with the midday sun flung smartly back from the shifting yellow sand.

Wind and sand and water have here been locked in ceaseless rivalry since the world was young. Hundreds of square miles of solid rock have been worn and washed away, leaving a rear guard of lofty red buttes pointing majestically toward the blue heavens. Here the elements have battled for superiority, and the wreckage of their long-continued strife is both a monument to the tremendous forces of Nature and a convincing reminder of the inconsequential capabilities of mere man.



Photograph by Neil M. Judd

DURING TWO LONG DAYS THE PARTY FOLLOWED THE TORTUOUS STREAM COURSE OF THIS ROCK-WALLED "DITCH" (GRAND GULCH)

Out of it an old Indian trail led over the rim toward the Clay Hills.

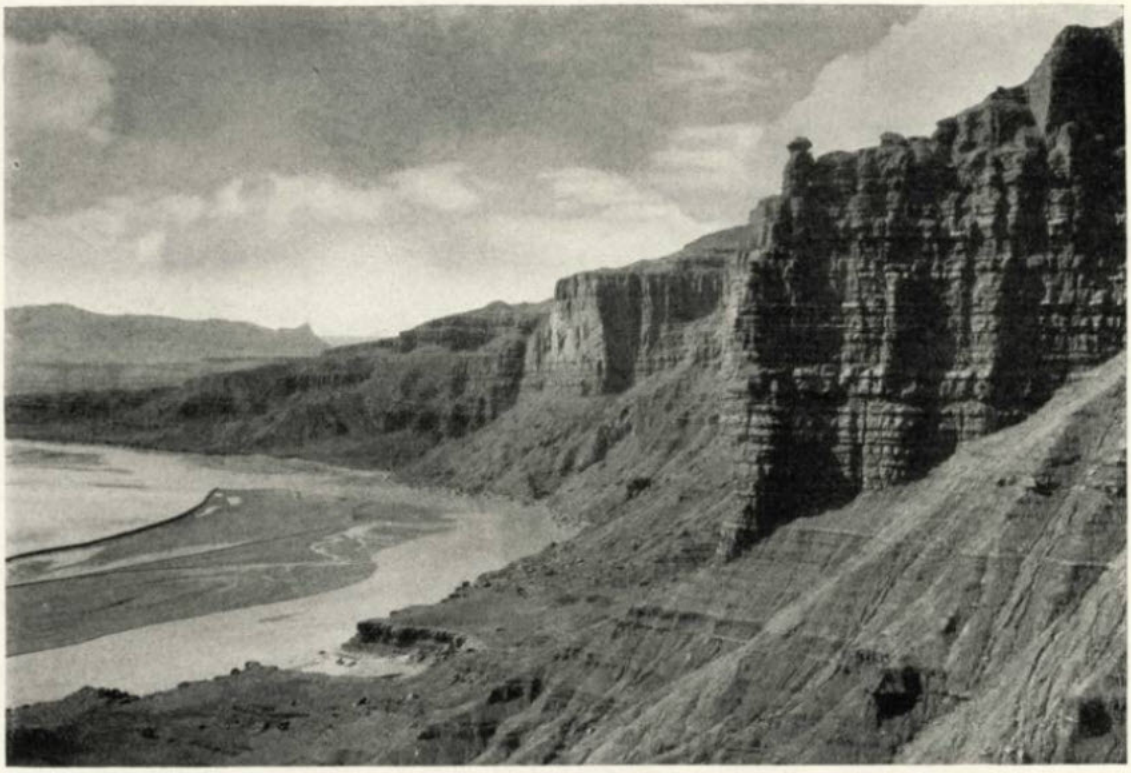
A PERILOUS TRIP FOR SUPPLIES

Ten days and 150 miles of trail brought us to a dripping seep on the west rim of Grand Gulch, with the red wall of the Clay Hills standing out boldly a short day's ride away. From this camp Wetherill turned down to the San Juan for a half ton of oats which Indians had agreed to deliver there. But he found no cache at the crossing and no recent signs of horses or men.

Realizing the Navajo had again failed us and cognizant of the hazard of proceeding farther without additional grain for the mules, Wetherill crossed the always treacherous river on a log; then, guided by the stars, walked 20 miles to a borrowed flivver and continued to Kayenta (see route, page 278). Our relief train had started on schedule, but had turned aside en route to attend a squaw dance; thereafter the urgencies of our expedition were forgotten.

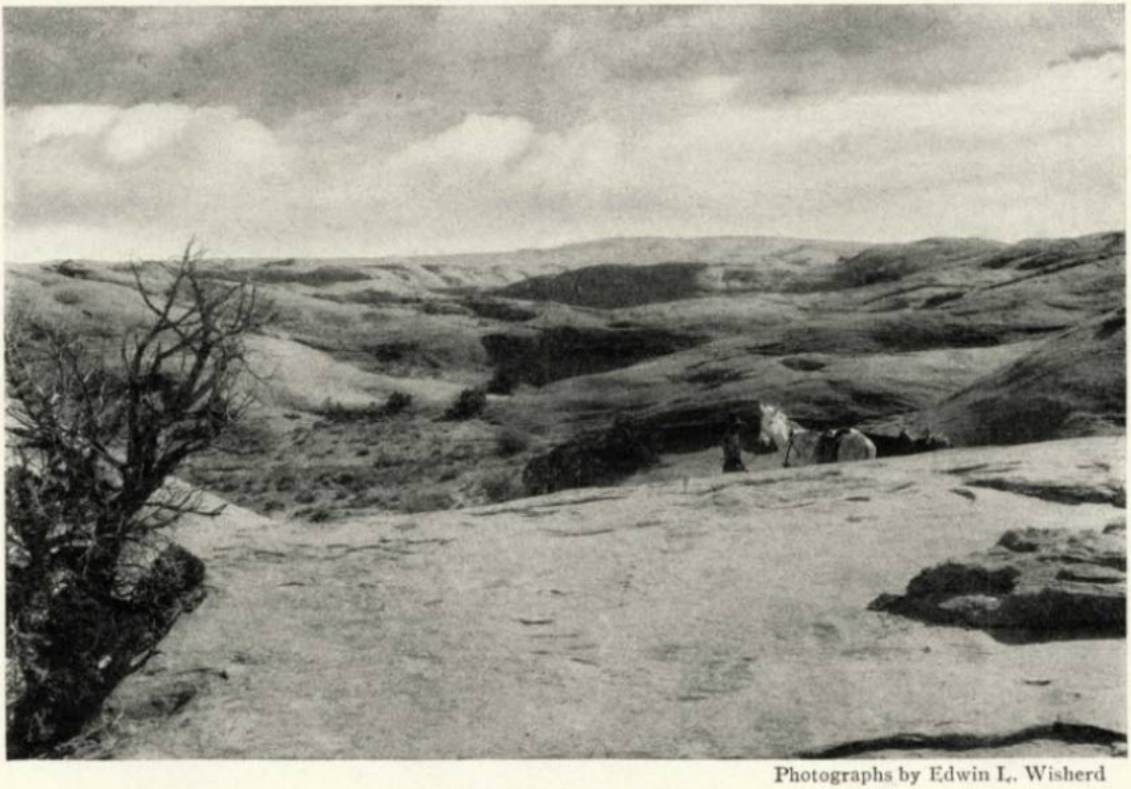
Three days later Wetherill was back at the ford, with the much-needed grain and a new recruit. We never inquired how he had persuaded the Indian to accompany him, although we noticed that the Navajo feigned sudden and serious illness as soon as he learned just where we intended going. But we had burro steaks for supper that night, and after a full meal the native gave an attentive ear while we expressed the hope that he would cancel any business engagements he had made for the next few days and continue with our party.

However dubious Cauz-zus-see may have been as to the wisdom of our venture,



WHERE THE CLAY HILLS MEET THE RIO SAN JUAN

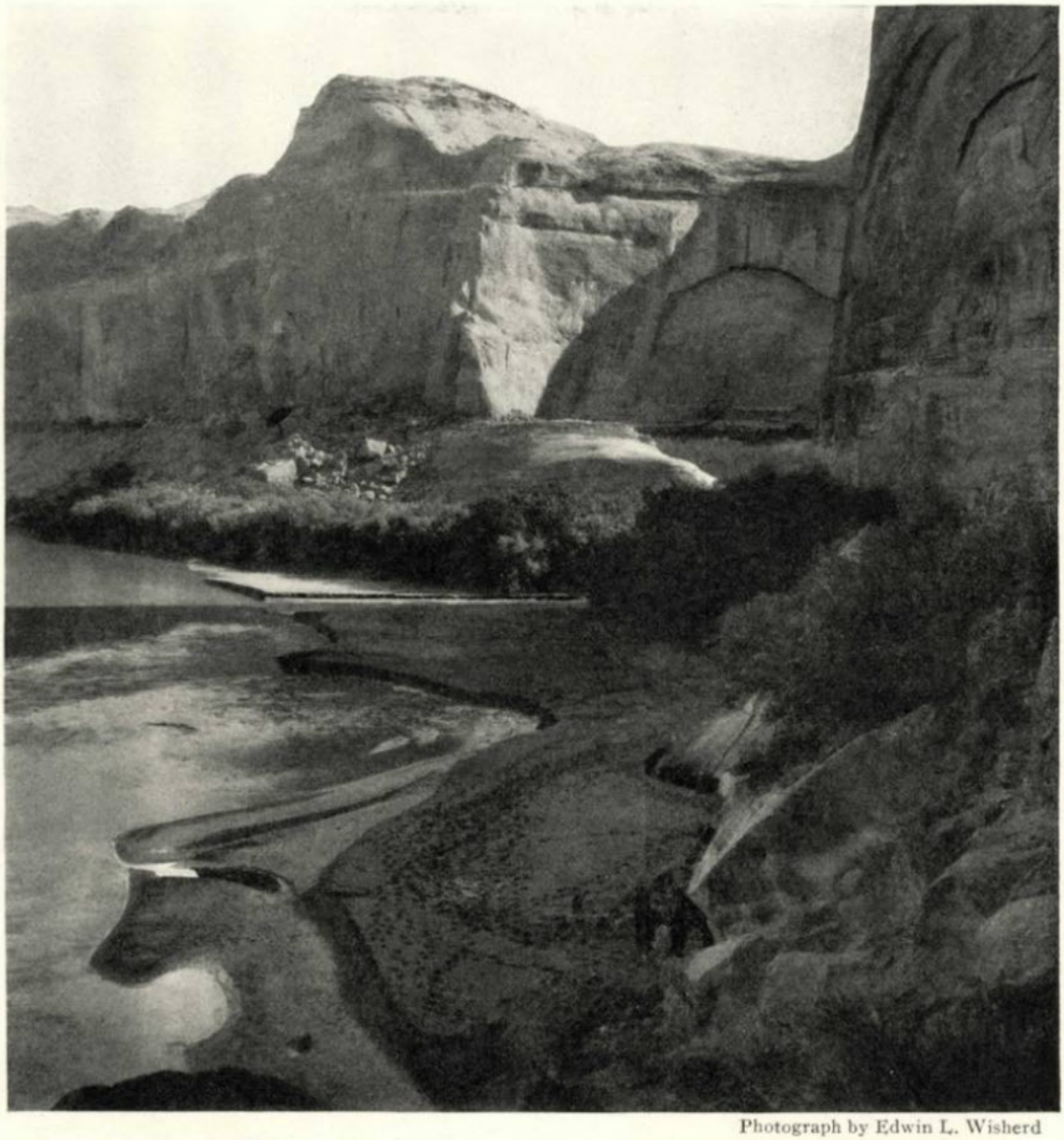
An unscalable barrier of many-colored clays and sandstones rising over 1,000 feet above the water. The pack-train was driven across the steep talus and down river for four miles to meet Wetherill returning with supplies (see text, page 285).



Photographs by Edwin L. Wisherd

BEYOND THE CLAY HILLS

Sand and sandstone reach out to meet the distant sky.



Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

WHERE MOKI CANYON JOINS THE RIO COLORADO

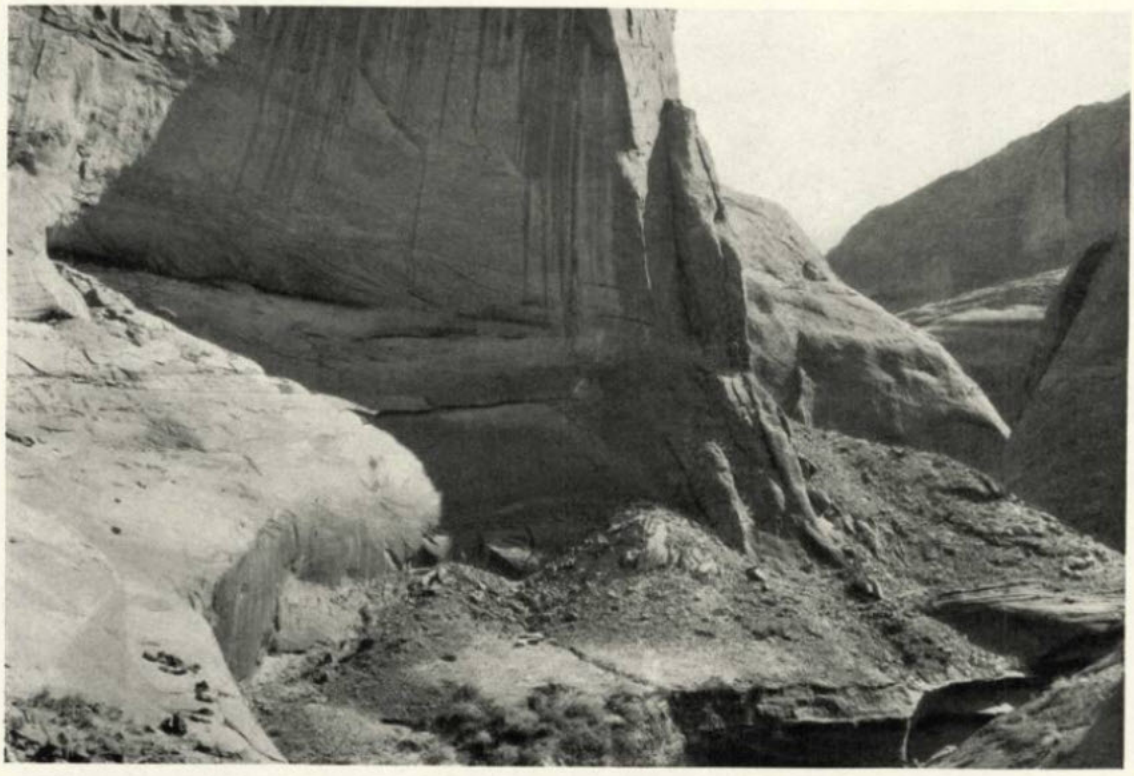
The "Silvery Colorado" is a dull red flood which carries heavy tribute of sand and clay from the four plateau States to the Gulf of California.

he soon proved a faithful and willing assistant. Personally familiar with only a small portion of the wild region beyond the Clay Hills, he yet retained vivid pictures of it as orally painted by older men. He found water in most unpromising places; he knew odd corners where our weary mules might graze contentedly for a night; but, somehow, his joy increased in direct proportion to the speed with which we traveled.

And when, a few days after we had forded the San Juan on our homeward journey, Cauz-zus-see galloped away light-hearted and happy to his hogan and family, the tall cliffs echoed the sharp minor notes of his buoyant trail song. He had returned in safety from the dwelling place of Evil!

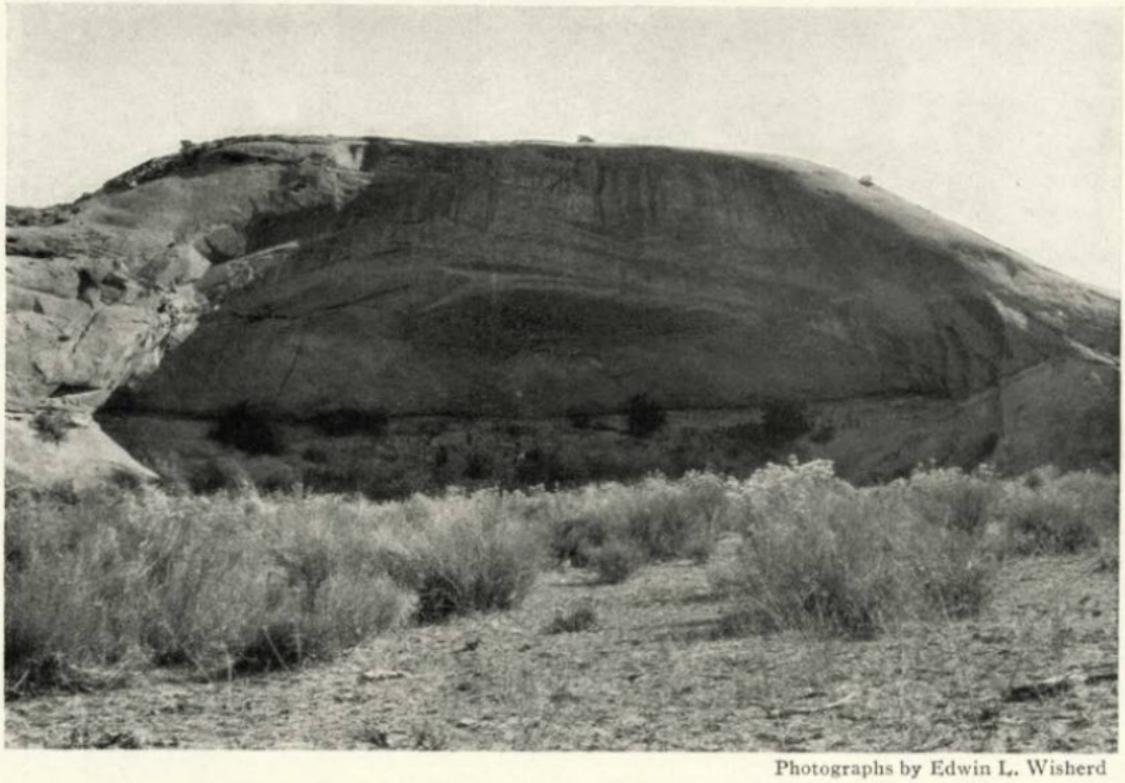
THE TRADITION OF FUNERAL PROCESSION TO THE HENRY MOUNTAINS

There is a dim, unverified tradition that the Navajo of old carried the bones of their dead warriors to a final resting place near the Henry Mountains. Elaborate



THE TWISTING WAY OF MOKI CANYON

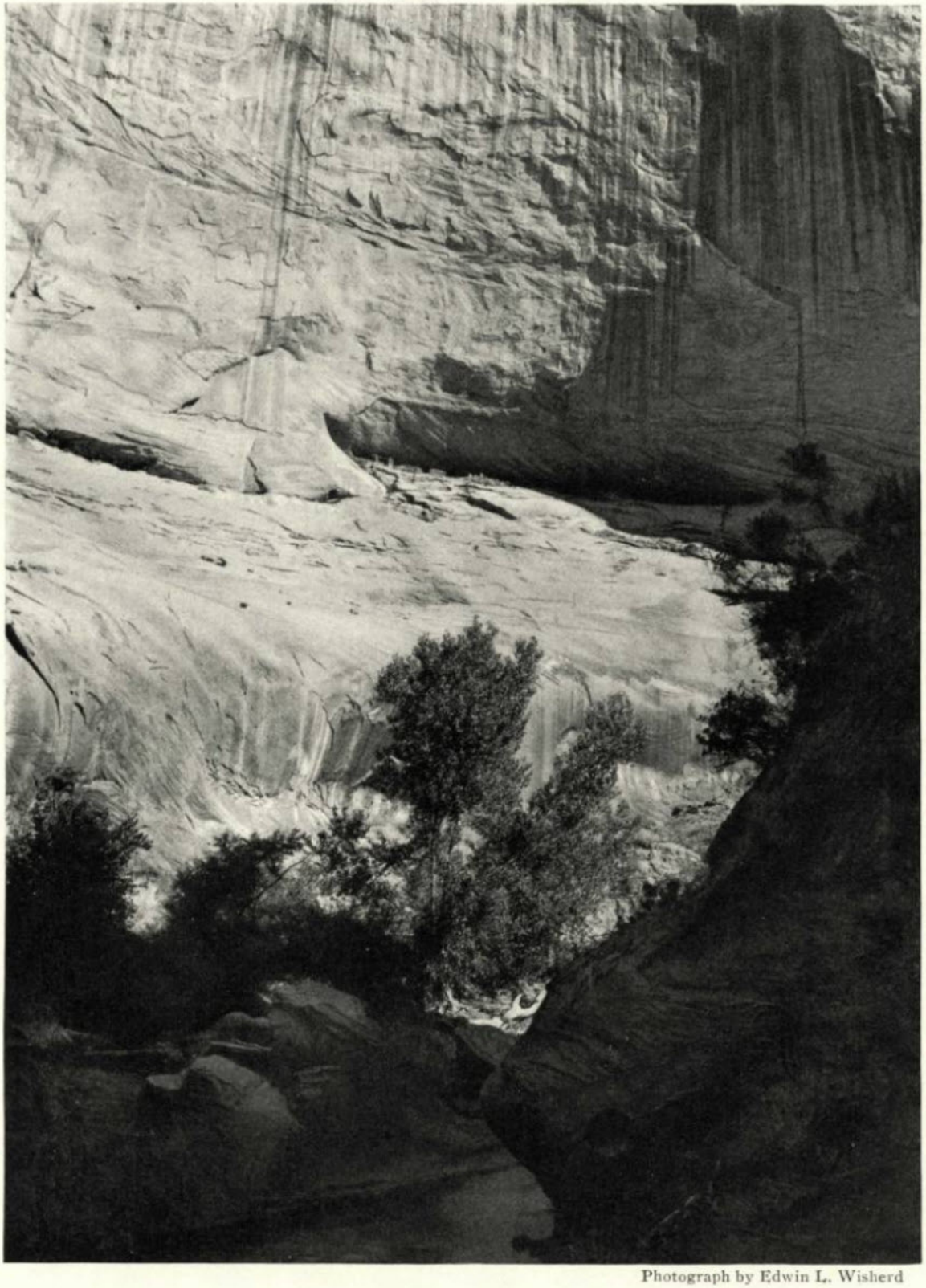
The Expedition followed a winding path for 18 miles through this silent canyon. In the cave at the left is a cliff-dwelling, and below it a series of steps, pecked with stone hammers.



Photographs by Edwin L. Wisherd

PRIMITIVE MAN BUILT HIS HOMES IN THE GREAT CAVES

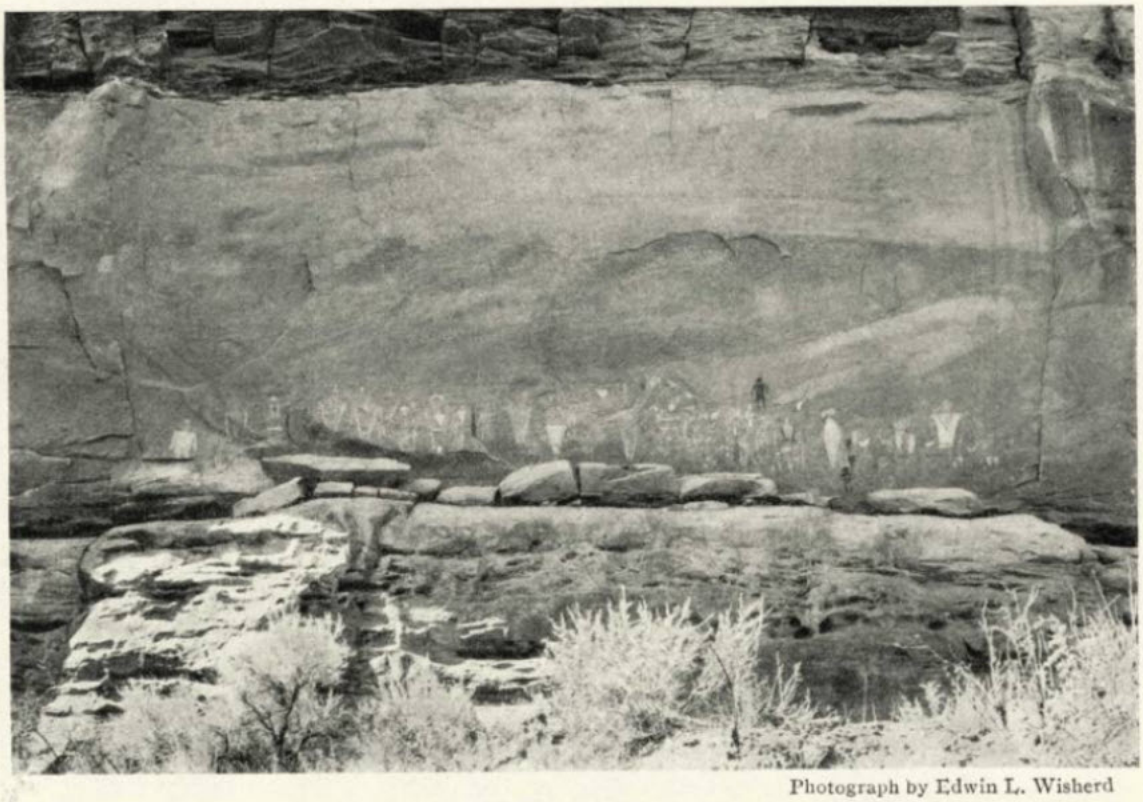
Those objects he lost or threw away hold much of his unwritten history. Note the mounted men at the edge of the cave shadow.



Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

AN ANCIENT RUIN IN MOKI CANYON

Like swallows, the prehistoric cliff-dwellers built cell-like homes high in the canyon wall, fairly secure from the attacks of Nature and their hereditary foes.



Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

PREHISTORIC ARTISTS, WITH A CLIFF FOR A CANVAS, DREW RED, WHITE, AND GREEN PICTURES OF ANIMALS AND SQUARE-SHOULDERED MEN IN WHAT IS NOW AN UNINHABITED LAND

ceremonies of prayer were enacted before crossing the San Juan and the Rio Colorado; other invocations were voiced as the carriers returned from their solemn mission. But these sacred rites are no longer performed; the requisite prayers have been lost with the fleeting years, for one-time bearers of the war shield are now few in number and their arrows lie broken.

If this suggested custom did in fact obtain in olden times, wherein lies its origin? Do the Navajo, in whose veins flows the blood of many captive peoples, trace some thread of their composite ancestry to the ancient cliff-dwellings that now crumble in the silent canyons far to the north? Strange places these and they prompt strange imaginings!

Prehistoric dwellings and the desert—they fit so well together! The desert appears to cherish those things which seem such an intimate part of it, and to reject speedily that which cannot know or understand its varying moods.

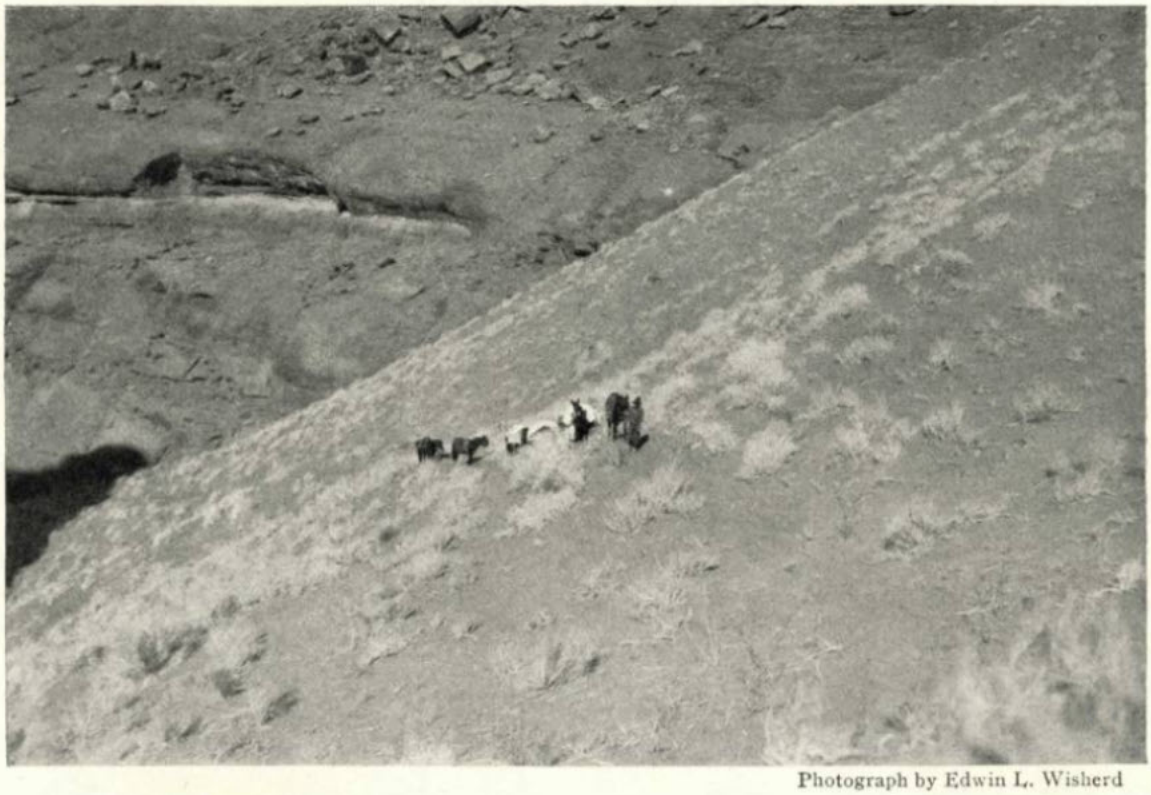
The great caves, with their abandoned camp sites, their storage cists, or their shattered ruins, tell a mute tale of human struggles long before the written history of our continent began.

On this journey beyond the Clay Hills we traversed canyons perhaps never before visited by white men; we crawled through narrow doors into dwellings no booted foot had previously entered; we climbed canyon walls on trails unused for centuries.

The ancient cliff-dweller was kin to the lizard; a series of shallow holes pecked in the sheer sandstone cliff was the ladder by which he scaled prodigious heights. The unwatered, sun-lit mesas, the shadowy canyons—he took these for home and hunting ground.

But prehistoric man did not dwell long in the parched country west of the Clay Hills. His habitations there were mostly crude affairs; he built no colossal structures such as Pueblo Bonito* and Pueblo del Arroyo. Perhaps he realized the utter impossibility of conquering a coun-

* See the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE for June, 1921; March, 1922, and July, 1923.



Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

A HUGE SAND DUNE FOLDED DOWN OVER A 500-FOOT CLIFF

This afforded a safe though toilsome way out of Moki Canyon.

try which remains to-day, centuries later, almost as wild and untamed as he left it.

IN MOKI CANYON, PLACE OF DEATH

Before starting on the recent reconnaissance we had been able to learn but little of the Clay Hills country, and that little later proved mostly to be erroneous. Moki Canyon, for instance, was represented as about five miles long and enterable, on foot only, in but two places. By boat, it was said, one could reach the slit through which Moki joins the Colorado; eastward, where a huge sand dune folds down over the rim rock, one could slide to the bottom of the gorge.

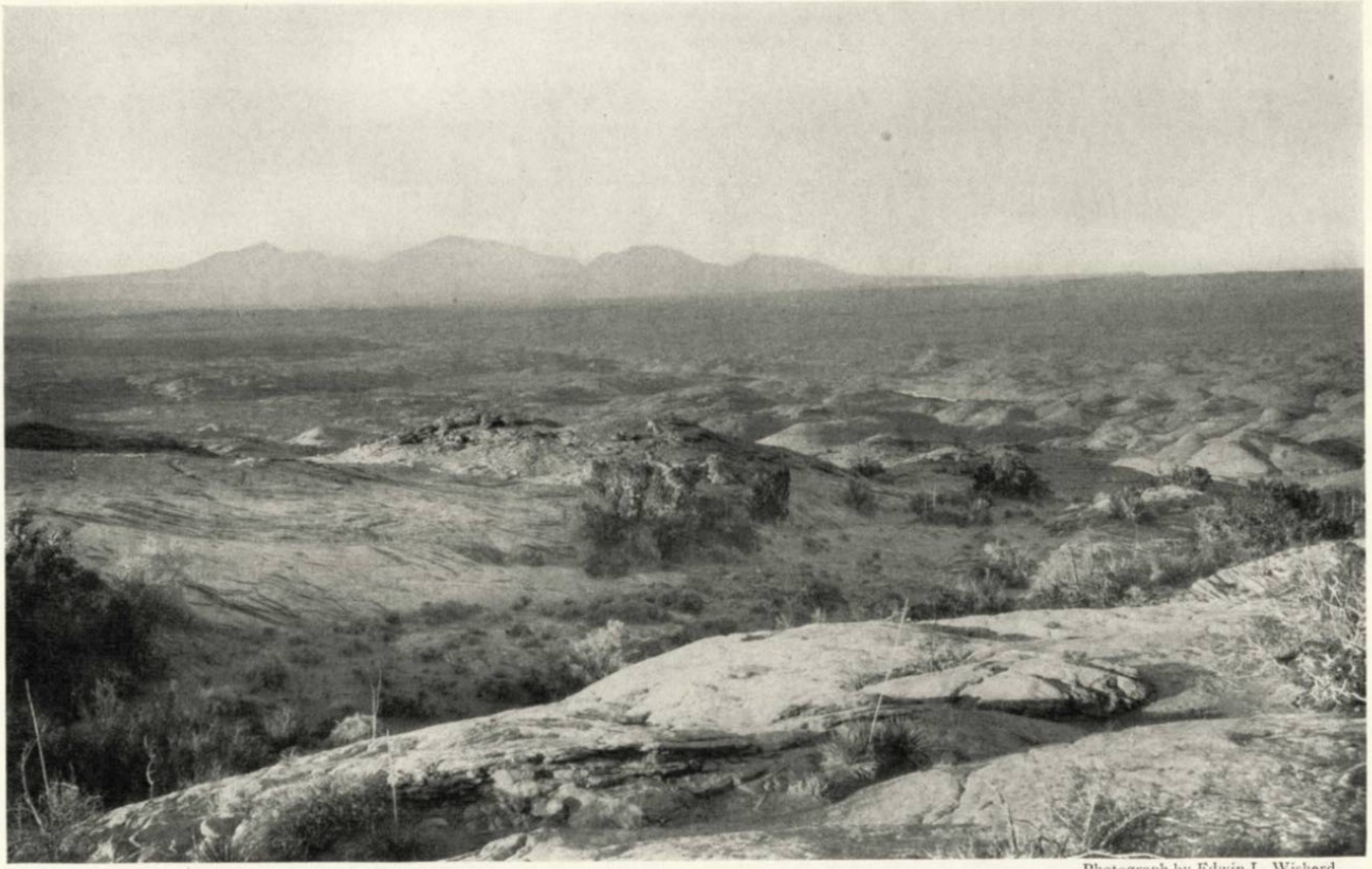
We made three camps in Moki Canyon, the last fully 18 miles above its mouth and perhaps two-thirds of its total length; we discovered old Indian trails—made, no doubt, by Navajo or Piute hunting parties—and took our mules up both the north and south cliffs. But this was not altogether easy; at times, indeed, it was a bit breath-taking.

Then, too, mules can be such perverse creatures. They will stop on the very edge of nothing at all to pluck a tuft of withered grass, with no thought for their companions, who may be holding a more precarious footing just behind. Although prepared for accidents and fully expecting them, our party seems to have been especially favored by the desert gods. We gave the password and advanced without fear.

When the going was too rough even for the mules, we reconnoitered on foot. Then, finally, as the whole country seemed to close in upon us, our colleagues were sent back with the pack-train to our main cache, while Wetherill and I continued alone.

For days we climbed canyon walls and crossed tiresome mesas, whose weathered sandstone glistened in the sunshine like whitecaps at sea. It is indeed a wild sort, this land beyond the Clay Hills, and destined always to remain so.

Once, in Moki Canyon, I noticed Wetherill check his horse suddenly; then press close to the left bank, as he circled a sheet of smooth, velvet sand beside a boulder that almost blocked the stream bed. Drawing quickly to one side and splitting the pack-train, I watched, with bated



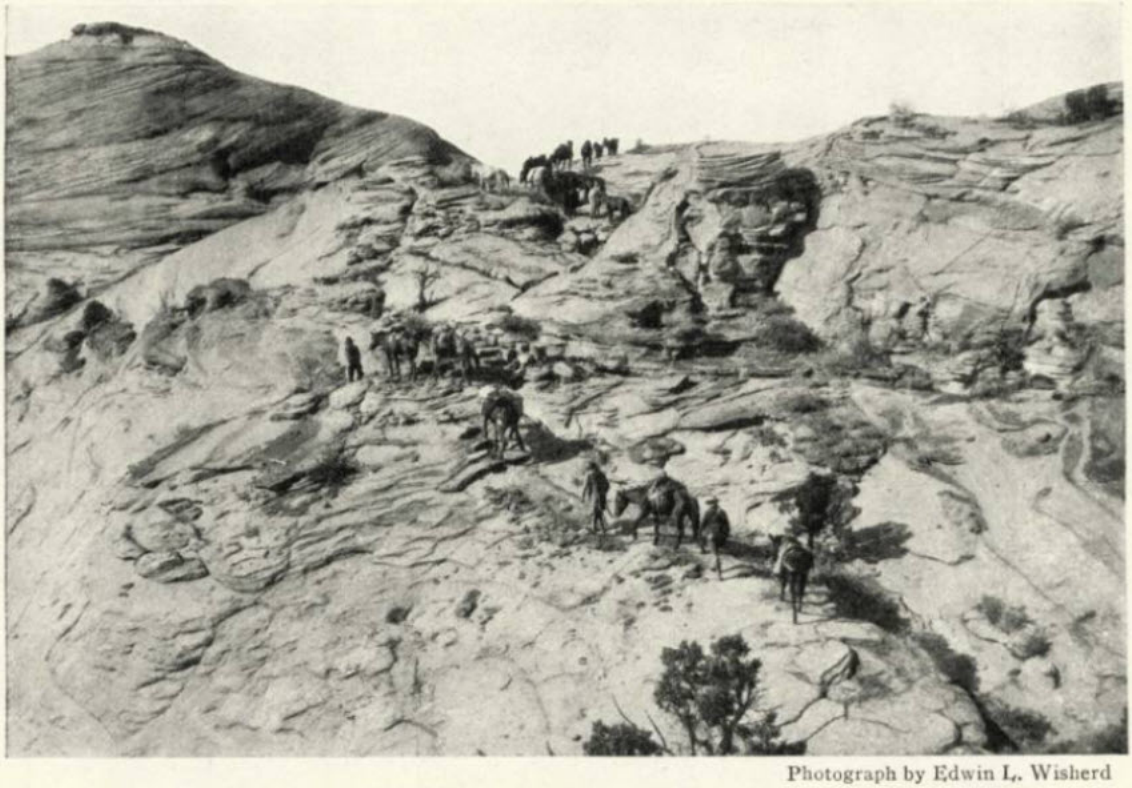
Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

THE HENRY MOUNTAINS FROM NEAR THE HEAD OF MOKI CANYON

The Navajo are said to have taken the bones of their dead warriors across these barren wastes to a final resting place near the distant mountains (see text, page 287).

Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

THE EXPEDITION'S PACK-TRAIN "SNAKING" THROUGH THE SANDSTONE LEDGES THAT STRETCH OUT FROM THE BASE OF NAVAJO MOUNTAIN



Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

WHEN THE WAY IS SLOW AND THE TRAIL IS HARD

breath, the sandy basin grow more liquid and more elastic as each animal crossed.

Only Wetherill and the Indian sensed the full strength of those devils that lay waiting in that bed of quicksand. Two short spans to the right, and mule or man would have been clasped in a viselike grip of unbelievable power.

Moki Canyon, place of the dead! Like the Venus flytrap (*Dionæa muscipula*), whose sticky leaves fold down upon the fluttering wings of a careless insect, the quicksands of Moki Canyon patiently wait to embrace the blind or heedless passer-by.

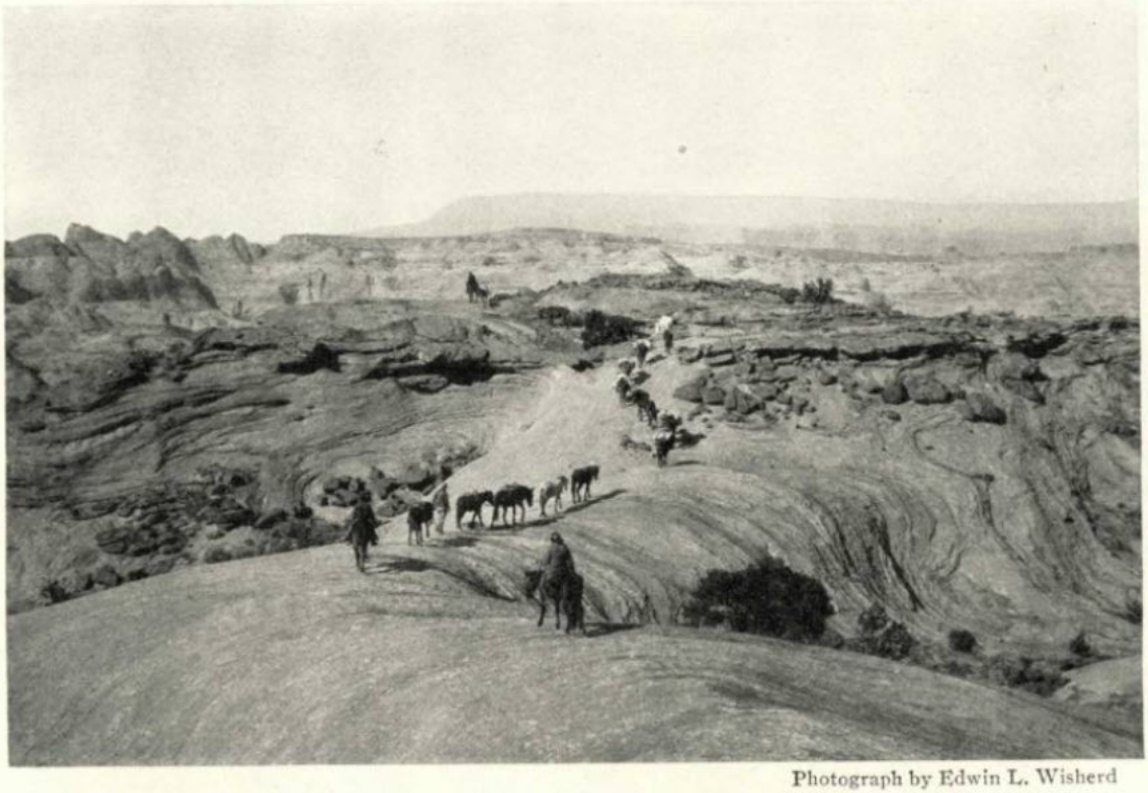
Under the quick steps of our mules, those treacherous sand pockets swayed and stretched like huge sheets of yellow dental rubber; beneath each thin, vibrant surface lay slow, cruel death for the unrescued. But we went through—the first pack-train to dare—through 18 miles of it, building trail when necessary, accepting risks that could not be avoided, curious as to what the next mile would disclose.

We had other experiences with quicksand, the last while fording the Rio San Juan on our homeward way. In this latter struggle Bino was the principal actor. Bino, the Beautiful! He was a wild little devil of reddish-brown color and he could kick you twice before you could get out of his way. His was a double-barreled attack. No one ever saw him raise those quick hind feet or put them down again. He just kicked, kicked twice, and, when necessary, he repeated.

THE STORY OF BINO, THE BEAUTIFUL

The trail we were following had been made by hunting parties in those glorious days when game was plentiful; when Navajo and Piute warriors, in a friendly sort of way, used to steal each other's women. The trail circled the south edge of Gray Mesa, wound through ragged canyons, and then dropped—I cannot recall that last thousand feet—dropped to the very edge of the drab, brutal river.

Cauz-zus-see was sent in to "feel" the crossing. He walked up and down, back and forth, in the icy waters; they were about four feet deep. Now and then he jigged a bit, testing soft spots his feet searched out. Quicksand could not be avoided entirely, but the safest path was marked. Straight across to the big riffle,



Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

ON THE TRAIL TO RAINBOW NATURAL BRIDGE

Where Nature builds fences Man walks antlike along their tops to reach forbidden fields beyond. Kaiparowits Plateau (see map, page 278) shows dimly in the distance.

then down current with it, gradually seeking the shore!

The mules were bunched and crowded in, close on the heels of the Indian's horse. Cold, muddy water chilled their flanks and rolled up against their heavy packs, but on they pressed, seeking to escape the unfamiliar shouting and swinging of ropes at their rear. There was a degree of frightened plunging, of snorting and throwing of water, as mule after mule broke through the thin river bed and struggled on.

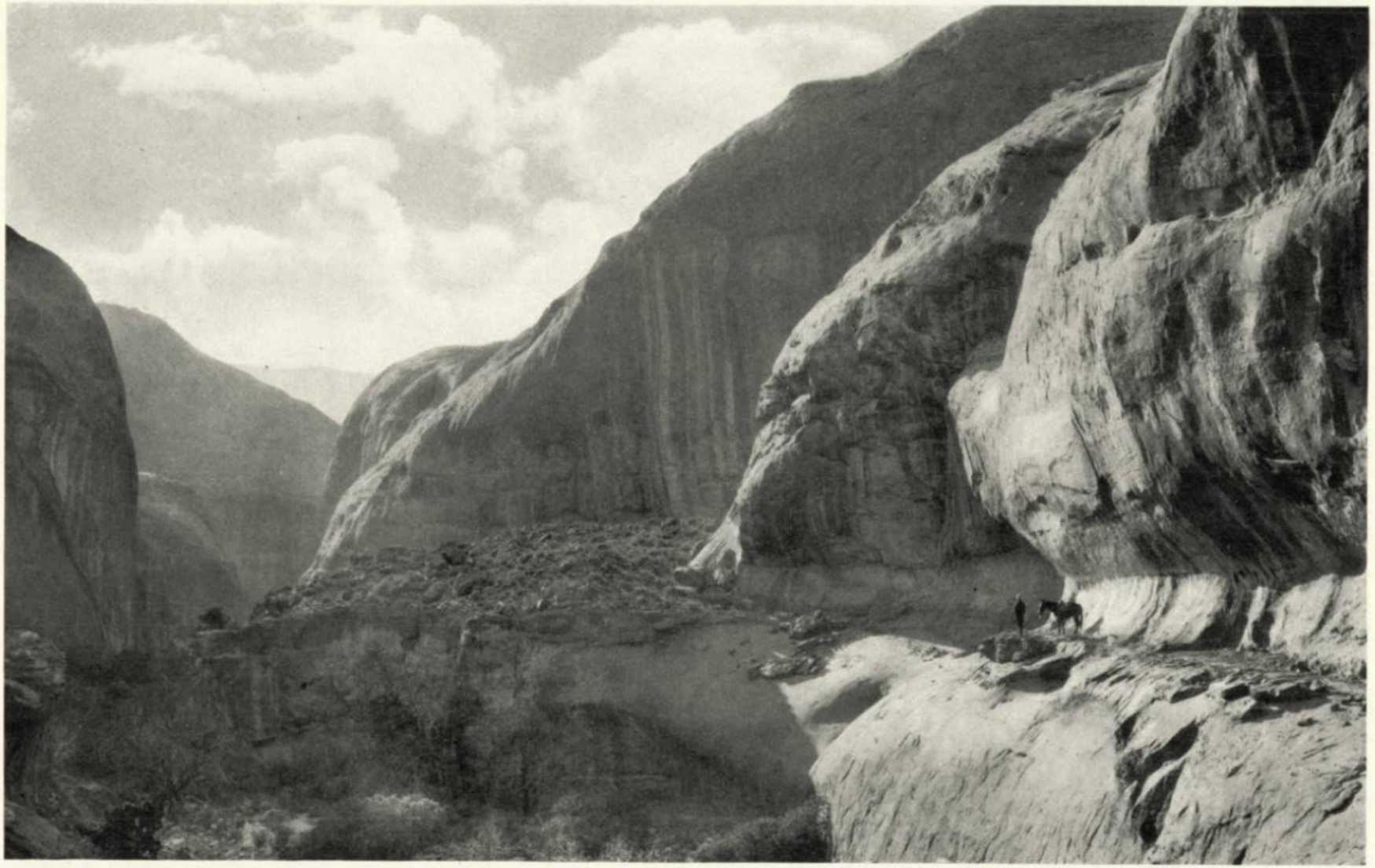
Then Bino went down, both forefeet at once. He squealed in fright and jerked back; the waves bowled him over; and with head under water he splashed and flopped and floundered around until shortly his efforts ceased and he floated on with the heavy current.

Help for the red mule just then was impossible. The other animals were already in the main channel, with liquid sand underfoot. Better lose one than a dozen, even though the lost mule did carry every cup of flour in the outfit! Wetherill hesitated a bare second; then, with a savage yell, forced his black horse against the stragglers. These lunged forward, crowding closely upon the Indian, as he guided them to shallow water and a boulder-strewn bar left by the summer's floods.

But Bino had one kick left! He delivered this as his trail companions neared the sheltering south shore. At a shout, the Navajo rushed back and pulled the mule's head above water; willing hands soon loosed the ropes and carried the soaked pack ashore piecemeal. The half-drowned creature was too weak to stand without aid, yet he blew spray like a sulphur-bottom whale.

A few moments later, when he went down again and floated out to the end of his hackamore, he was literally towed to the water's edge, set on his feet, and roundly cursed, however dejected and bedraggled he appeared at the moment. Bino was no longer beautiful!

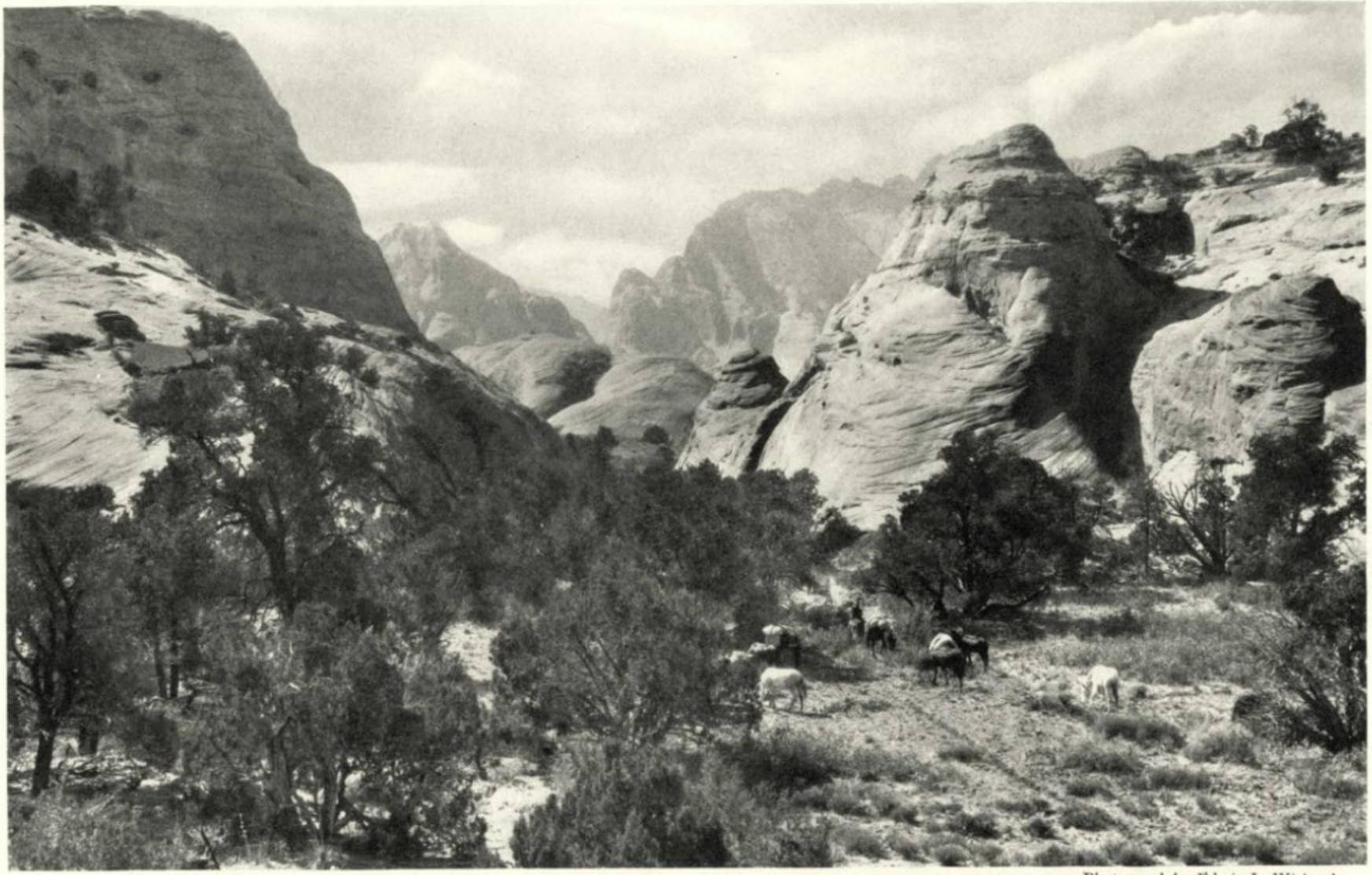
Our flour was thoroughly wet and one sack had been lost; Bud's bed was drenched and mud-soaked; and there was not even a kodak to witness the crossing!



Photograph by Neil M. Judd

ALONG A NARROW PATH IN BRIDGE CANYON

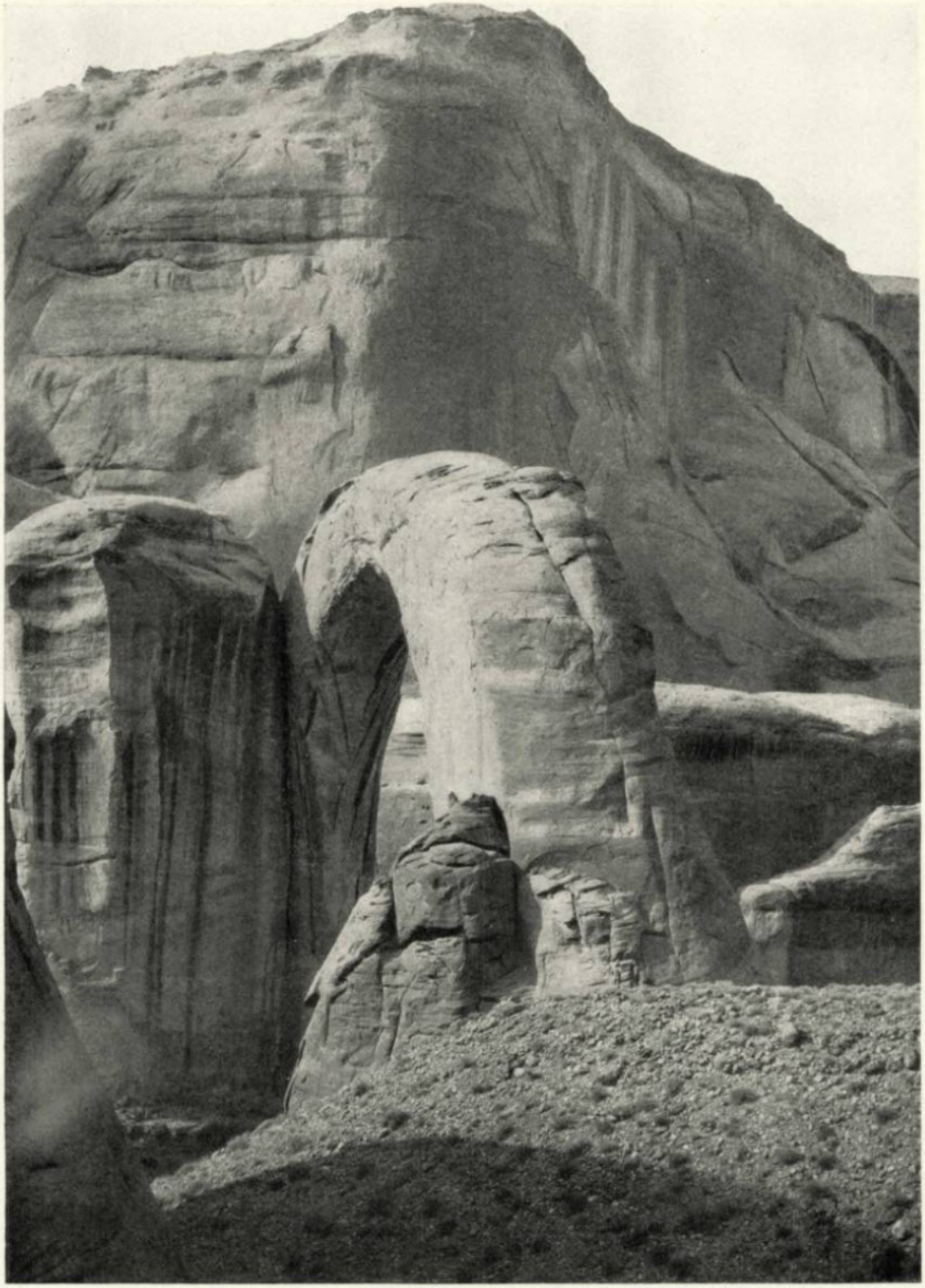
On the way to Non-ne-zo-shi bo-ko, canyon of the stone rainbow.



Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

SURPRISE VALLEY

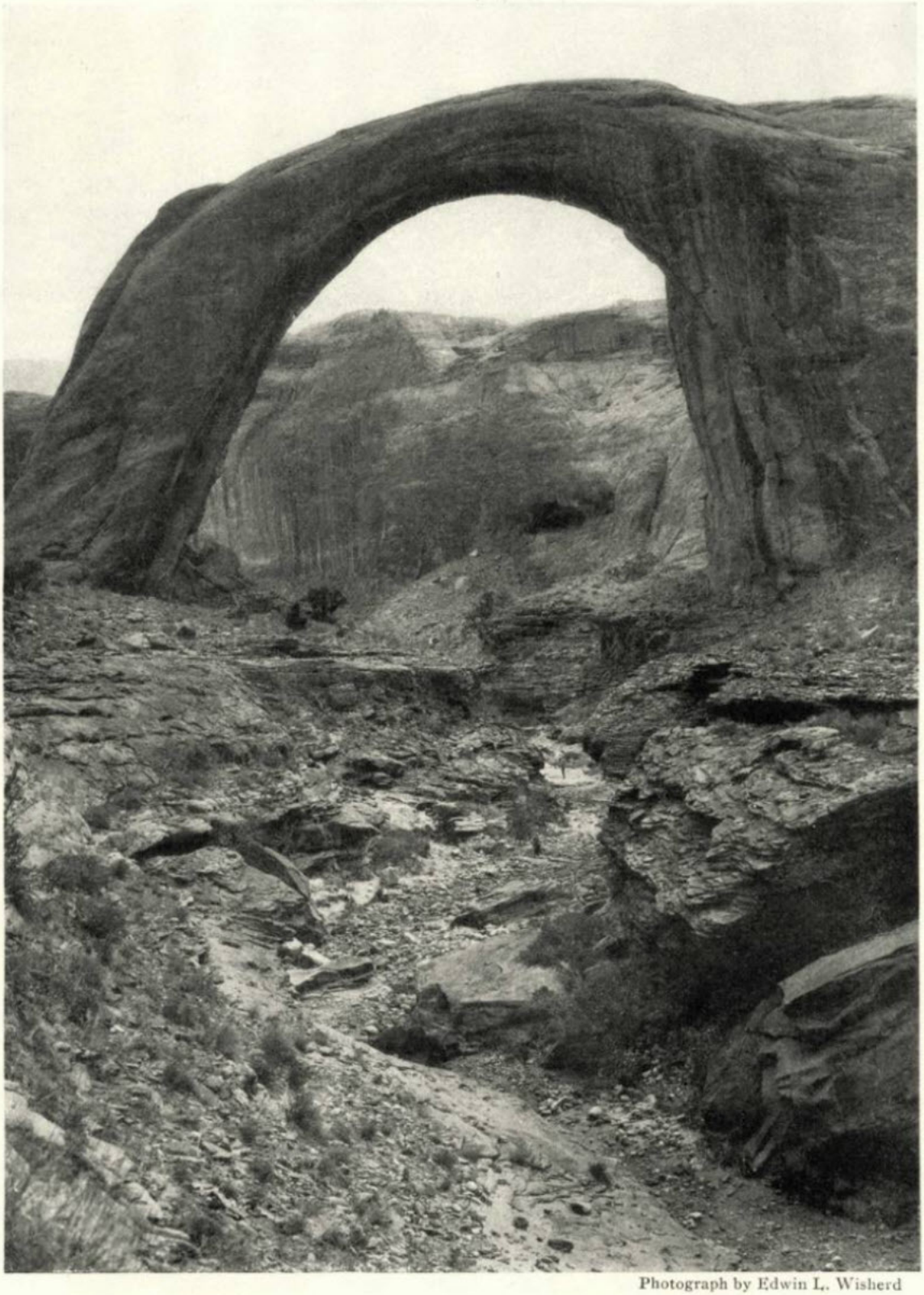
Made famous through the writings of Zane Grey, this spot offers the most restful and refreshing camp ground between Kayenta and the Rainbow Bridge.



Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

THE RAINBOW NATURAL BRIDGE

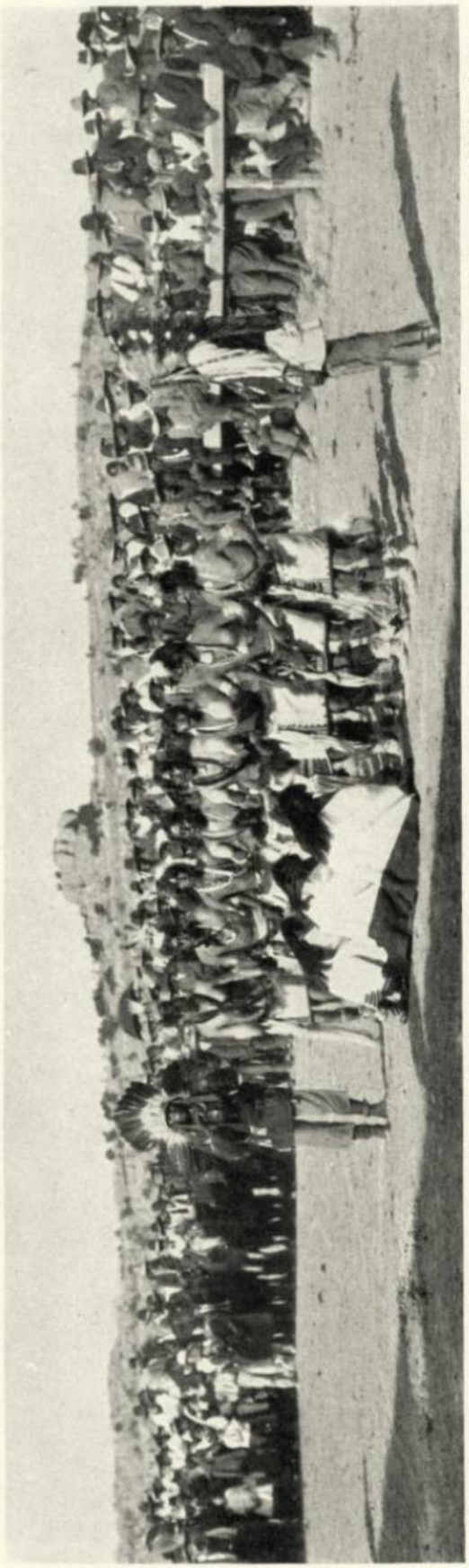
The men standing at the upper base of the great arch afford some slight conception of its massive proportions; yet the "bridge" is dwarfed by the walls of the canyon itself. Devout Indians will not pass beneath the arch without saying prayers to their Supreme Being.



Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

LOOKING THROUGH THE RAINBOW-TURNED-TO-STONE

According to Navajo mythology, a rainbow was here turned to stone, thus permitting certain hero gods to escape flood waters in the canyon. An ancient shrine still stands beneath the left-hand buttress. Note the man on the white rock in the gorge.



Photograph by Neil M. Judd

BASKET DANCE OF THE TEWA INDIANS

Each fall a "ceremonial" is held at Gallup, New Mexico, when neighboring Indian tribes join in friendly competition to determine not only which one presents the most beautiful native songs and dances, but also which village has made greatest progress in the crafts of the white man.

Always the pictures one especially desires are lost! This particular day was cloudy and dull and a misty rain was falling to prevent use of the cameras. But similar misfortune had greeted us so frequently before. Only the previous day, trailing along the thin edge of Gray Mesa, we glimpsed floating bits of most marvelous panoramas, screened by a dense fog that rode on the canyon winds and at times actually hid the guide from those who followed at the end of the pack-train.

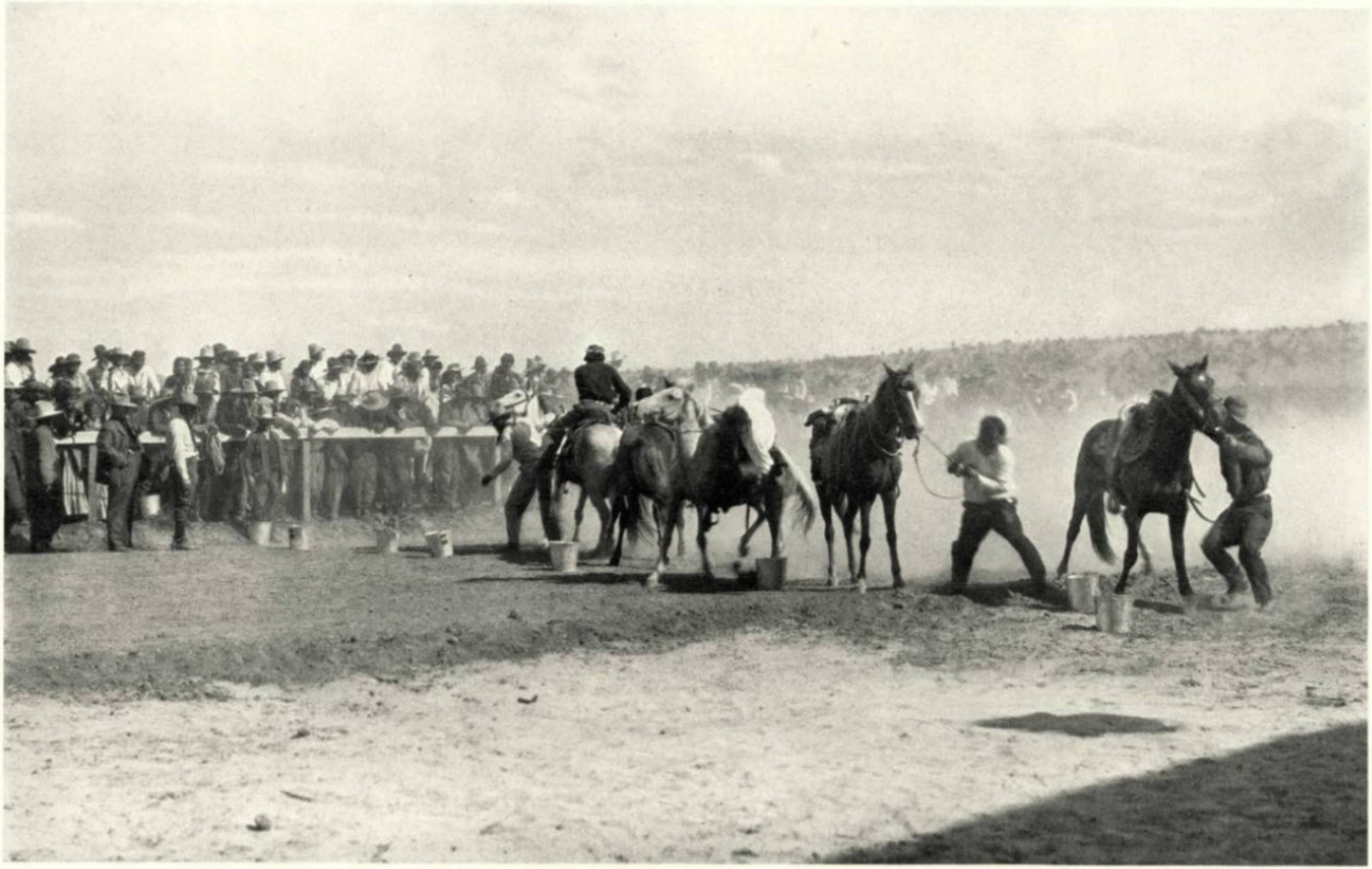
What wonderful paintings were shielded from us on that bleak rim rock we may, perhaps, never know; but we could sense them. To the north the endless yellow vast, gutted by twisted canyons, we had but recently left behind; toward the south the broad bulk of Navajo Mountain, home of the gods, pivot on which many native legends turn; east and west reached the sheer canyon walls of the San Juan, with its sullen current coiling slowly and silently far below, like an arm of a gigantic octopus.

But when the clouds are heavy and hang low one cannot take pictures, and when the mules are in the quicksand one does not think of pictures, until afterward. And for this reason photographic records of exploration journeys are usually incomplete.

TRIALS AND DISCOMFORTS OF THE TRAIL

Never were rains more persistent than last year! They began in midsummer, which is proper, and continued until early November, which is not at all as it should be. At the very beginning of our expedition, high water in the San Juan forced a long eastward detour. Storm clouds camped with us frequently, and then, as if loath to see us leave, held us for days at Kayenta because a weary sun was too tired with constant drying out of mudholes.

Those transcontinental motorists who have waited dejectedly in a



Photograph by Edwin L. Wisherd

AN INDIAN "POTATO RACE" AT GALLUP'S ANNUAL CEREMONIAL

The winner is he who first carries a given number of potatoes, one at a time, a measured distance and deposits them in a pail at the goal.

wide adobe flat for help to come through the miles of mud have seen the Southwest at its wettest. There, summer showers are almost tropical in their intensity. They fill arroyo banks and undermine bridges while you wait. They loosen boulders, throw down trees, and start landslides; they add to the work and worry of riders.

But most trail accidents, if no serious injury is involved, sooner or later disclose humorous possibilities. The personal discomfort of one's saddle companions is always fit subject for jest. And during the rainy season, especially, opportunity knocks frequently.

Sodden biscuits are filling, if unpalatable; salted coffee can be drunk. To watch cold, clubby fingers build a fire with soggy wood is indeed amusing. But the very acme of trail humor follows when a tired rider reaches camp at nightfall to discover that his bed tarp has not protected his blankets from a penetrating shower. One can forgive human frailties and omissions, but when the gods take sides the joke is too good to disregard utterly.

There is the case of little Mac—flat-faced, lop-eared Macduff—slowest and most obstinate of all our pack-mules. We were climbing the south wall of the San Juan and our clothes were still drenched from the rescue of Bino; the trail was wet and steep and a bit tricky. In trying to make one particularly high jump, Mac struck the corner of his pack, fell backward, and rolled over. Stub caught him on the very edge of the precipice and sat on his head, while George climbed atop the prostrate mule to loose the lash rope.

Now there was nothing ludicrous about Mac's predicament at the moment; his hind feet were thrust out into empty air a good fifty feet above a jagged rocky talus. He was safe if one stubby cowpuncher could hold down his head and prevent his struggles while the bulky pack was removed and those dangling hind feet pulled back on to the trail.

No one was present to point a camera; all hands stretched to help the stubborn mule with the Scotch name. But afterward, on the easy mesa trail, when the strain of the rescue had vanished, much sport was made of Mac's narrow escape, of Stub sitting complacently on the mule's head, of George scrambling over the wet, muddy pack, tugging at the rain-stiffened ropes.

Two days later we stood beneath the graceful arch of the colossal Rainbow Natural Bridge (see pages 298 and 299), marveling at the stupendous folly of Nature, who builds temples to herself and then, in changeful mood, tears them down again. Low-hanging clouds bowled across the gorge to reveal, for seconds only, the glistening snow-covered summit of Navajo Mountain. Chill winds rushed down the canyon to cry and moan in the creviced red walls.

AT THE RAINBOW BRIDGE FOURTEEN YEARS AFTER ITS DISCOVERY

Fourteen years before I had first seen this sublime creation of the Master Builder. Following Professor Cummings, urged on and encouraged by John Wetherill after our Indian guides sought to quit their wearisome task, we had come, the first white men to gaze on the great Na-gee-lid Non-ne-zo-shi—the Rainbow-Turned-to-Stone. Those early memories, those initial impressions, still baffle description.

The trail of to-day is much easier than the one we built; its more dangerous portions have been smoothed out or avoided. Three hundred individuals, including the late ex-President Roosevelt and a score of travelers from abroad, have followed in the footsteps of the discoverer and few have returned disappointed. Not all of these strangers came with reverence in their hearts. One, for instance, seems to have had as his chief object in visiting Non-ne-zo-shi the opportunity to be able to tell his grandchildren that he was the first civilized man to drive a golf ball over the stately arch.

And so it was very gratifying to note, after these many years, that the Rainbow Bridge, alone among the natural wonders of our country, remains pretty much as the desert gods made it.

Majestic in its solitary retreat, yet dwarfed by the massive cliffs that tower above it, the stone rainbow is still the mystic bridge over which the true sons of Earth may escape their mortal sorrows. As a rule, the desert makes brother worshipers of all who venture into its secret places to share its hidden mysteries.