

First Motor Sortie into Escalante Land

BY JACK BREED

With Illustrations from Photographs by the Author

THE station wagon groaned and creaked as it staggered to the top of a sand dune and mushed down the other side. Behind it lay 30 miles of such trackless, rough terrain that only by a miracle had the car kept going.

Ahead stretched a mysterious land of weird shapes carved by wind and rain—a wonderland of ember-glowing rocks, saberlike peaks, awesome canyons, and delicately chiseled natural bridges looped in gleaming arches against a steely sky.

The lead vehicle of our Escalante Expedition of 15 adventurers stood at the edge of the last frontier in Utah, one of the least known wilderness areas in the United States. Our mobile headquarters was this handsome Pontiac station wagon, which carried the flags of the National Geographic Society and the Explorers Club, of New York (page 372).

Generous citizens from neighboring towns, and especially the U. S. Bureau of Land Management, had contributed three jeeps, two trucks, 35 horses, and all the food. Rollin Usher, of Cortez, Colorado, had lent us his trim Stinson monoplane for aerial work; and Art Greene, of Marble Canyon Lodge, in Arizona, had agreed to meet an overland group at Hole in the Rock crossing with his special boat and take us on Colorado River trips.*

Mystery Land near Bryce Canyon

By facing southeast from Inspiration Point a visitor to Bryce Canyon National Park can look down on the Escalante Country, named for the Spanish padre who explored the area at the time of the American Revolution (page 379 and map, page 380). Like many curious people who view the region from there, we, who were now much closer, were anxious to find out just what was hidden among all those cliffs and canyons.

"Did you ever hear of any natural bridges or arches in this country?" I asked John Johnson.

"Yes," he said, "I've heard tell of one or two, but in my 40 years here I've never seen any. I'm always too busy looking for stray cattle or good grass feed to notice the scenery."

Leaving Cannonville (page 376), we dropped off the roadway into Paria River Valley, following the stream bank until we

were able to cross. We continued on a rough, sandy trail east toward Dry Valley and a chalky precipice near Slickrock Bench. After ten miles we came out into a broad, flat valley, open to the south but hemmed in on the north by thousand-foot white sandstone cliffs.

A Color Photographer's Paradise

It was beautiful and fantastic country. A mile to the left near the base of the cliff I could see red pinnacles thrust up from the valley floor. The few natives who had been here called this area "Thorny Pasture," but we renamed it "Kodachrome Flat" because of the astonishing variety of contrasting colors in the formations.

Huge rocks, towers, pinnacles, fins, and fans surrounded us. Everywhere the results of erosion could be seen in all stages (pages 374 and 375).

Continuing southeast, we fought our way over sand dunes, ledges, and rock benches and through numerous washes. I was glad the car had oversize tires and extra-powerful gears.

At 4 o'clock we stopped high on a plateau near the upper Wahweap basin and climbed to the top of a commanding mesa. With binoculars I scanned the country beyond us. Carefully studying every fold and canyon in a high white palisade four miles to the north, I thought I could see a break through one of its numerous fins. The others agreeing, we set forth toward the gleaming palisade.

Our highest expectations were soon realized. What we saw was an arch—a new arch, uncharted and unnamed!

This striking natural bridge is carved from creamy rock, a rarity in a land of brilliant reds. Actually, it is a double arch, with the larger span on the end of a buttress that juts from the main sandstone butte. Near the anchor end wind has blasted a smaller hole through the buttress (pages 371 and 373).

* In the party were Don Moffitt, range manager for the United States Bureau of Land Management; Allen Cameron and his son Kelly; Burnett Hendrix, Ralph Hunt, and Rollie Allen, all of Panguitch, expert jeep drivers; John Johnson, Wilfred Clark, Doyle Clark, Sam Pollick, and Tom and Clark Smith, from the little Mormon towns of Tropic, Cannonville, and Henrieville, ranchers who knew the region and lent horses, feed, and guide services; biologist Golden Kilburne of Utah State Agricultural College; David Hart of Santa Barbara, California; and the writer.

Later a U. S. Geological Survey crew measured the gigantic creation of erosion. It is 152 feet high, 99 feet wide, and only four feet thick at the top of the span. As far as we could learn, we were the first to find it.

We named this feature "Grosvenor Arch" in honor of Dr. Gilbert Grosvenor, President of the National Geographic Society, the man who, we all agreed, had done more than any other person to arouse public interest in geography.

First Camp in a Ghost Town

After charting this natural bridge we established our first field camp in the deserted settlement of Paria, 30 miles down Paria River from Cannonville. The setting was reminiscent of a Hollywood western in technicolor. Bright red, pink, and white cliffs hemmed us in on all sides. Several rustic log cabins dotted the canyon floor where the river had cut a swath half a mile wide in a broad bend. Swaying cottonwoods and willows provided welcome shade.

Paria (pronounced "Par-ree" by natives) was one of several hidden settlements started along the stream by early Mormon pioneers "called" to settle the area by the mother church. T. W. Smith, Sr., father of one of our guides, was one of the first settlers to farm the region in 1868.

The struggling settlement changed its location several times because of irrigation and drinking-water conditions. Eventually, about 1912, the place was abandoned. Many of the old buildings were still standing, however. We moved in and pushed the pack rats out.

"What does 'Paria' mean?" I asked Tom Smith. "The way you pronounce it, it sounds like the French for 'Paris'."

"It's an old Piute word originally spelled Pahreah," Tom replied. "It means either 'Muddy Water' or 'Water Muddy.' No matter which way you look at it, the stream ain't pretty!"

From our Paria camp we made numerous side trips to hidden canyons and remote valleys by pack horse or jeep. One trip up Kitchen Canyon took us past the "Monkey House," built in 1896 by Dick Woolsey. The house was an odd affair, part cliff and part cabin, snuggled against the base of a huge boulder outcrop (page 393).

When Woolsey and his wife settled in this area, they brought a large monkey. Being the first anyone had seen in this country, the pet made the Monkey House famous. He was kept in a small cupola atop a post near the cabin. Whenever he noticed anyone ap-

proaching, he would chatter loudly to warn his master.

Woolsey's next-door neighbor, three miles away, was John Kitchen, for whom the canyon was named. Kitchen's cabin still stands, slowly falling into ruin after 60 years of desertion. I found it infested with bull snakes under many of the rotting boards.

As a compliment to Kitchen's bride, Molly, early cowhands named one of the most prominent peaks in all of the Four Corners Country for the lady. This sandstone tower gleams white above a surrounding maze of pink canyons and playas of southern Utah.

Although the pinnacle can be seen from the highway across the Kaibab Plateau in Arizona, to reach it requires a pack trip and plenty of time. Near its base we found a gem of blue water called "Nipple Lake" by the few cowmen who had ever seen it (page 392).

It was hard to believe that such a body of water could exist in so arid a land.

Beyond the lake rises a massive white mesa called "No Man's Mesa" because for generations no one was able to climb it. John Johnson told us that eventually he had built a trail to the summit and found good feed there. Ever since, the flat-topped peak has provided a perfect grazing ground that requires no fencing.

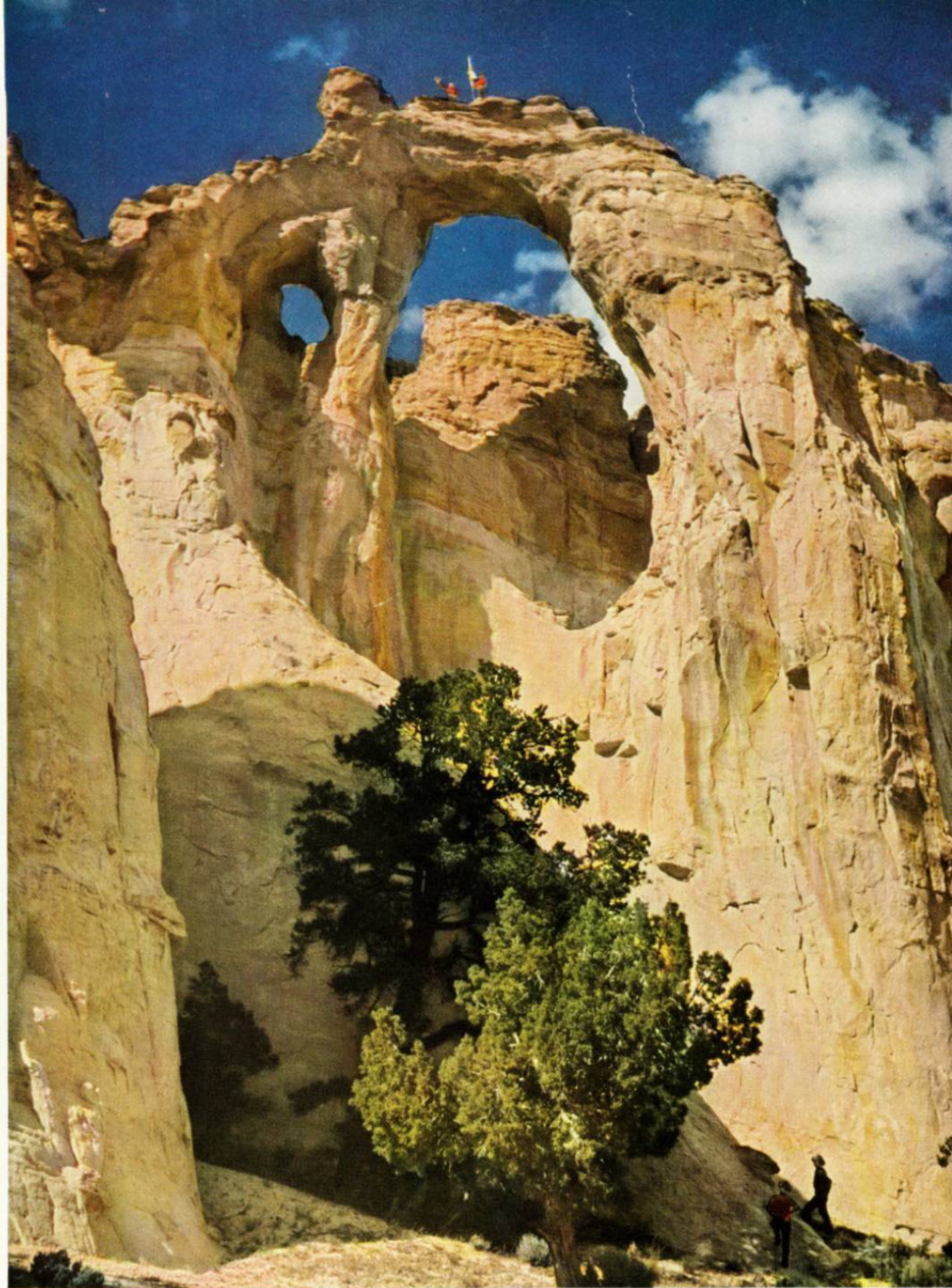
In caves near the base of the cliff we found several small Pueblo storage houses, along with numerous petroglyphs and colorful Indian drawings. These were among the few signs of prehistoric inhabitants we encountered on the entire expedition. The Escalante Country is a vast, forbidding land; and it was obvious no dweller could survive long in the region.

By jeep we worked our way upstream from Paria to investigate such side canyons as Deer Creek, Sheep Creek, and Bull Valley Gorge. Here indeed was another Zion National Park. Immense walls of white sandstone overhung us on both sides. The sky became a tiny slit of deep blue.

Desert Storm Sends Expedition Scurrying

In some places the gorge became so narrow that arms could not be extended from both sides of the jeep at the same time (page 391). The cliffs above rose a sheer 2,000 feet. All I could think of was, what a terrible place to be caught in a cloudburst!

On our fourth day at Paria I understood why the early pioneers had been driven out. The weather could play mean tricks. Heavy clouds began to gather in a sky that had been clear only minutes before. A strong wind sprang up.



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Ektachrome by Jack Breed

Above Grosvenor Arch, Gleaming Against the Utah Sky, Waves the National Geographic Flag
The Escalante Expedition named the striking formation in honor of the President of The Society. Located in rugged country southeast of Bryce Canyon National Park, the double arch towers 152 feet, spans 99 (page 373).



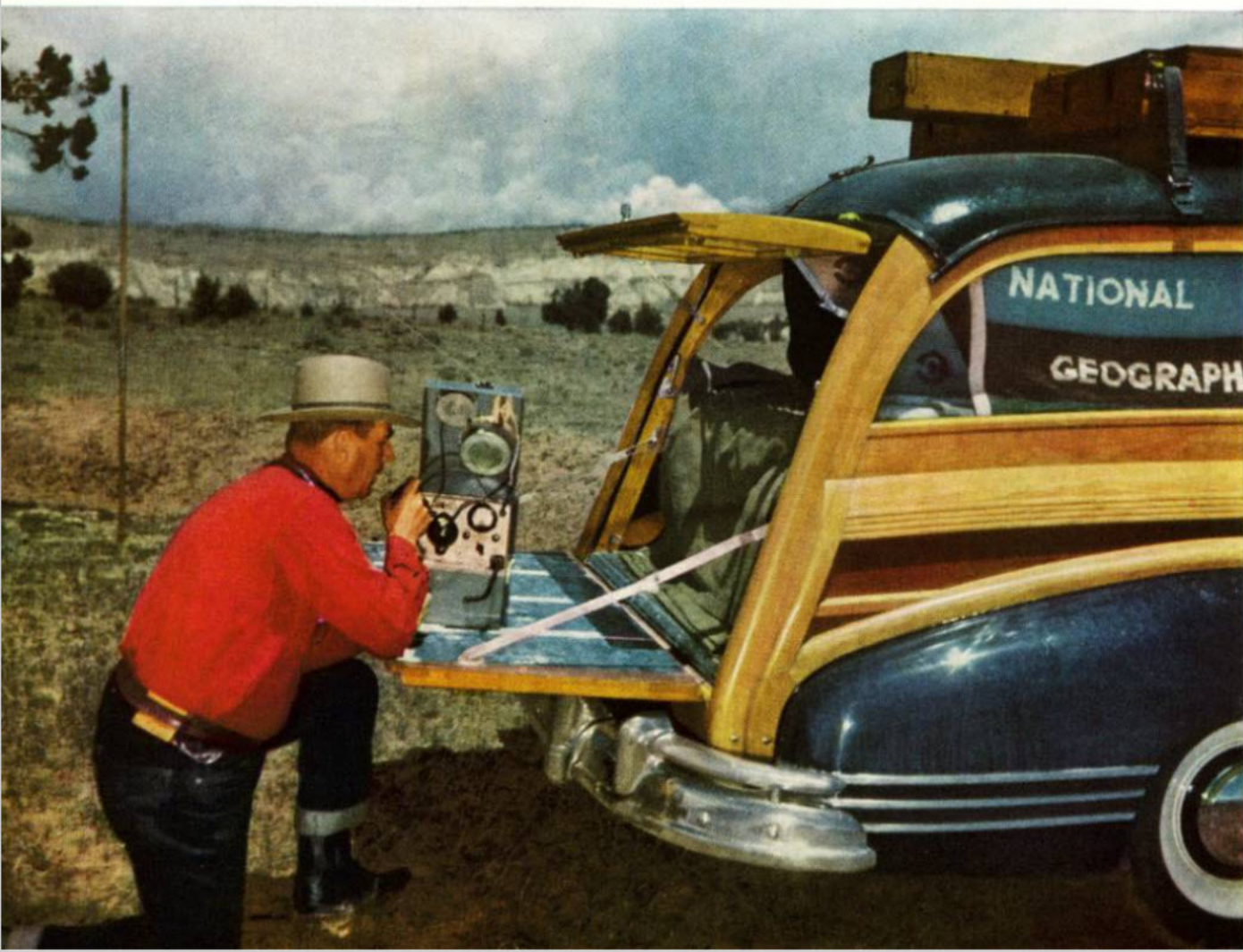
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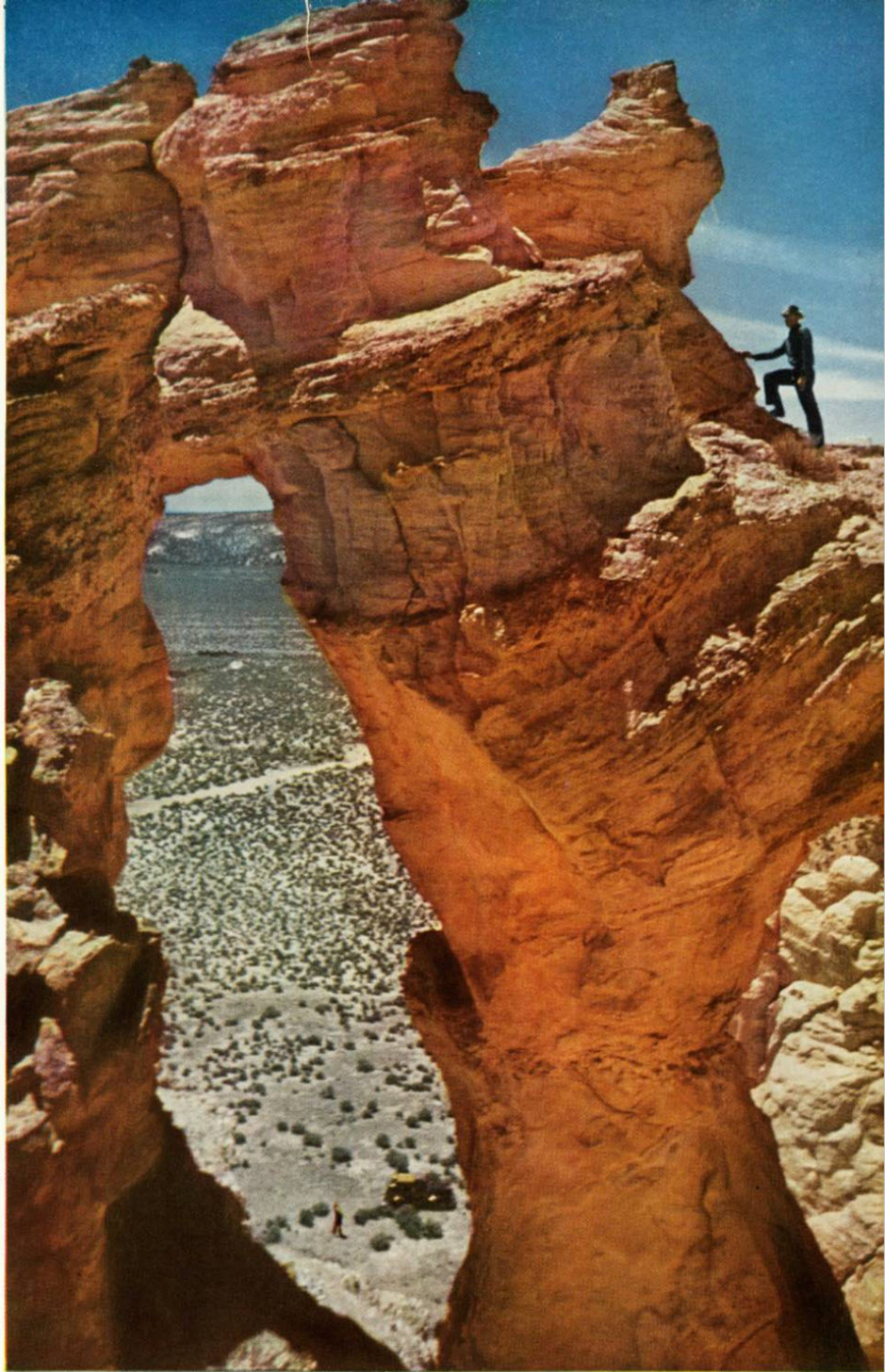
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Kodachromes by Jack Breed

Gone Are the Prairie Schooner, Campfire, and Smoke Signal of Indian Days. Now It's a Fleet of Cars, Gas Stove, and Two-way Radio

Besides stove and radio, the station wagon boasts a built-in bed with innerspring mattress, sheets, screens, and ice chest. Despite such luxuries, exploring southern Utah's wild and forbidding Escalante Country is tough going. Heat, sand, and sudden storms test men and cars. Above, chow time; below, Don Moffitt, U. S. range manager and an Expedition guide, tries to contact the outside world.

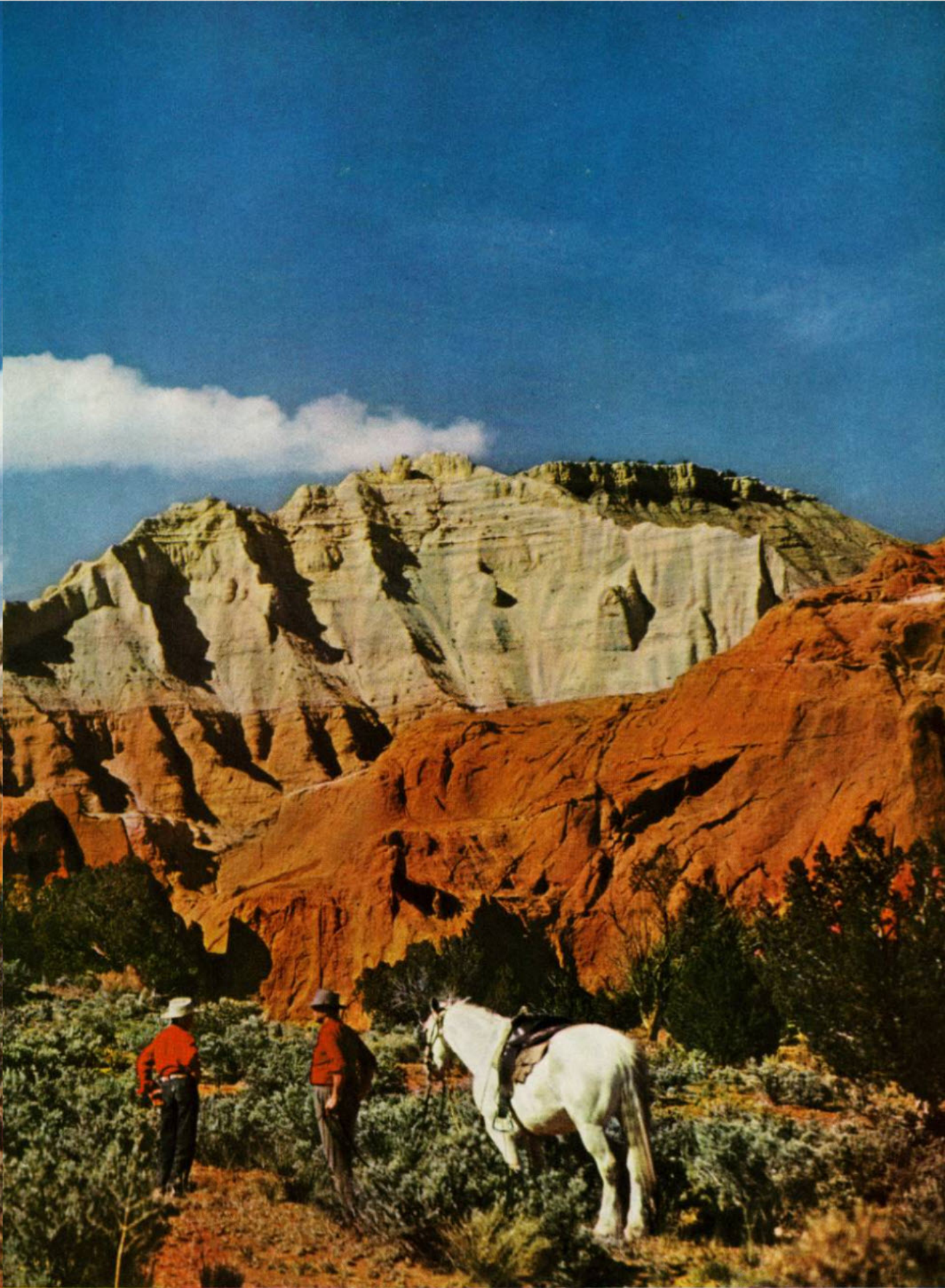






Escalante Expedition Named This Glowing Valley "Kodachrome Flat"

Its many-hued opalescence, unusual even for the Southwest, makes the isolated valley a photographer's dream come true. Fantastic rock fins, towers, and pinnacles thrust skyward. Unnamed white sandstone cliffs tower 1,000 feet.



Cowmen, Too Busy Hunting Stray Cattle To Note Its Beauty, Called It "Thorny Pasture"

Spiky red rock pinnacles, hundreds of feet high, suggested the name. Only a few local cattlemen have ever wandered into the hidden valley, only five miles from Henrieville. The Expedition stumbled on it the first day in the field.



Remote Cannonville, an Expedition Jumping-off Place, Survives on Irrigated Land in Dry Paria River Canyon
Many early Mormon settlements here have been abandoned. To supplement farming, Cannonville people graze sheep and cattle on the uplands.

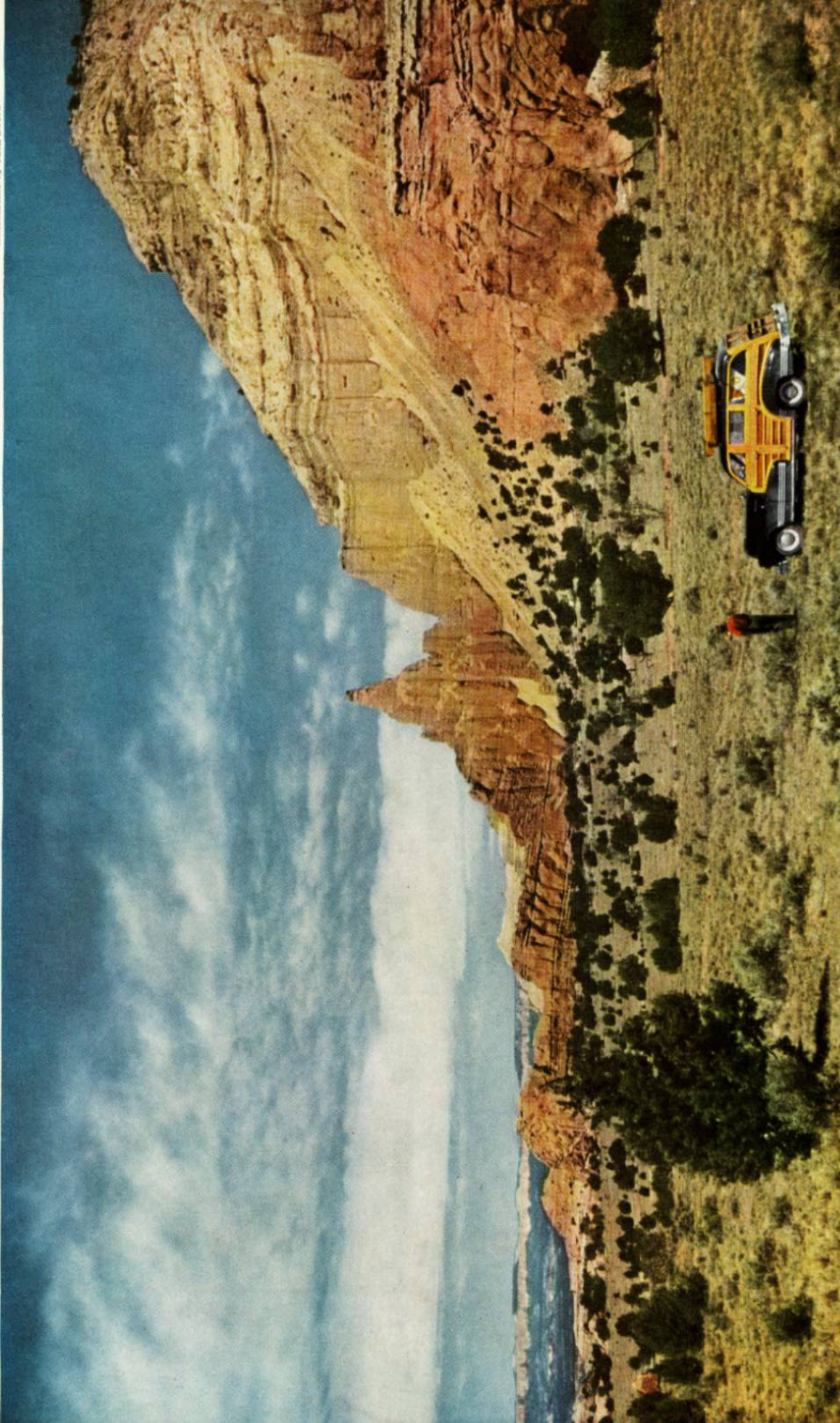
The Expedition's Mobile Headquarters Scouts Dry Valley, Broad Sand and Sage Highway into the Unknown

When Dry Valley lived up to its name, it was easy going; after a storm it was a sea of mud. The specially geared station wagon could fight its way almost anywhere.

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Ektachrome by Jack Breed





Following Desolate Paria River Canyon, Mormon Pioneers Took the Low Road to Arizona
Wagon trains, creeping south in this jagged scar, crossed the Colorado where the Paria joins it at now abandoned Lees Ferry (left). In 1872 the newly established ferry was the only crossing in hundreds of river miles.

This, too, was no place to be caught in a downpour. In no time the river might rise to a raging torrent ten feet deep and sweep away vehicles, animals, and supplies.

Soon gusts swept through the canyons at express-train speed, stinging our faces with blasts of fine sand. The horses began to get uneasy. Camera cases that were supposed to be dustproof filled with sand.

All hands scurried to gather up the bedding, equipment, and supplies. In half an hour the pack horses were started down the canyon toward another deserted settlement, Adairville, 10 miles away.

The heavier vehicles traveled a longer trail, for the canyon floor was too treacherous with quicksand and possible flooding. The station wagon, carrying delicate camera equipment, was hustled back to Kanab, Utah, into the shelter of a garage to protect the gear from a severe sandblasting.

Whit Parry opened the doors of his superb lodge to welcome us, and once the dusty station wagon was squared away we wasted little time in washing off our spotty "tans" in hot showers. Fresh broiled mountain trout satisfied vigorous appetites, tempered on the trail by a steady diet of beans and fried potatoes. Little wonder that Hollywood folk like Parry's for Utah location headquarters (page 385).

By midnight wind and dust quieted down, and early in the morning we fought our way back over the "Coxcomb Trail" to join the horses in Adairville.

Named for its first settler, Thomas Adair, the town was originally settled by Mormon pioneers in 1873 but abandoned in 1878 because of lack of water. It was from this base that we planned to attempt the first trip ever made by automobile to the historic Crossing of the Fathers at Glen Canyon on the Colorado River, some 65 miles distant.

Where Escalante Crossed the Colorado

In 1776, trying to make their way back to Santa Fe, Padres Silvestre Vélez de Escalante and Francisco Atanasio Domínguez passed to the south in Arizona. Near Lees Ferry they began to work their way upstream along the west bank of the Colorado, looking for a possible ford. After days of arduous searching, their scouts informed them that near the mouth of Padre Creek (so named in 1936) they might be able to lead the pack animals to the canyon bottom and cross the formidable Colorado.

Arriving at the designated crossing, later called the "Old Ute Ford," Escalante and his companions were forced to hew steps in the face of the slickrock to enable the horses

to descend the steep slope. The Colorado was crossed successfully, and fortunately an easier ascent was found on the other side.

Dr. Russell G. Frazier directed the expedition in 1937 which finally established the exact point where Escalante crossed, and since then a small plaque has been embedded just above the high-water level of the river to mark the spot.*

Expeditions that reached this point before us had all been by boat or pack train. Previously, no one had dared to risk a vehicle in this wild country. Soft pink sand dunes, steep and drifting, stretch for miles. Impassable canyons and ledges, hundreds of feet deep, have to be headed or by-passed.

The Jeep Goes Where a Horse Cannot

Guide Tom Smith, who had packed to the crossing several times, insisted the sand was so soft a horse would sink in it up to its belly. Others thought we could get to Warm Creek, 15 miles from the crossing, but would have to hike from there. A few of us remained adamant that a jeep could do anything.

One jeep and the four-wheel-drive truck set out at sunrise one bright morning when it looked as if the weather might hold. The going was easy at first as we followed a Survey crew trail up out of Paria River, across Clark Bench, and down into Wahweap Creek.

For miles we drove along the dry stream bed, praying it would not rain. In three hours we reached Lone Rock, a gigantic chunk of white sandstone that stood like an outpost near the end of the Wahweap. At its base was the camp of the Survey crew, which was working over on the Colorado selecting the site for a huge new dam.

Beyond Lone Rock the trail diminished, and soon we were strictly on our own. The vehicles climbed and groaned up out of Wahweap and across a broad sand plateau. Then they began to slide down the other side into Warm Creek.

We were now following almost the exact route of Escalante, but I began to think we wouldn't for long. This was no country for an automobile.

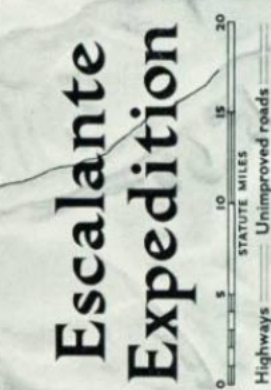
The Truck Drops Out of Sight

The truck was about half a mile ahead of our jeep when it suddenly dropped from sight over the rim of a dune. We thought it had rolled off. Arriving at the edge, we found a clifflike slope more than a hundred

* See Map of Southwestern United States, showing trails of early Spanish explorers, issued as a supplement to the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE for June, 1940.

Escalante Expedition

Henry Mountains
8150 +



Oasis town of 1100 was named for Spanish priest who in 1776 sought a direct route from Santa Fe to California.

Panguitch, trade center for cattlemen, miners, and sportsmen, was the Expedition's main headquarters.

Mormons on a historic trek to the San Juan Valley frolicked on Dance Hall Rock. Their descendants re-enacted the scene for Expedition.

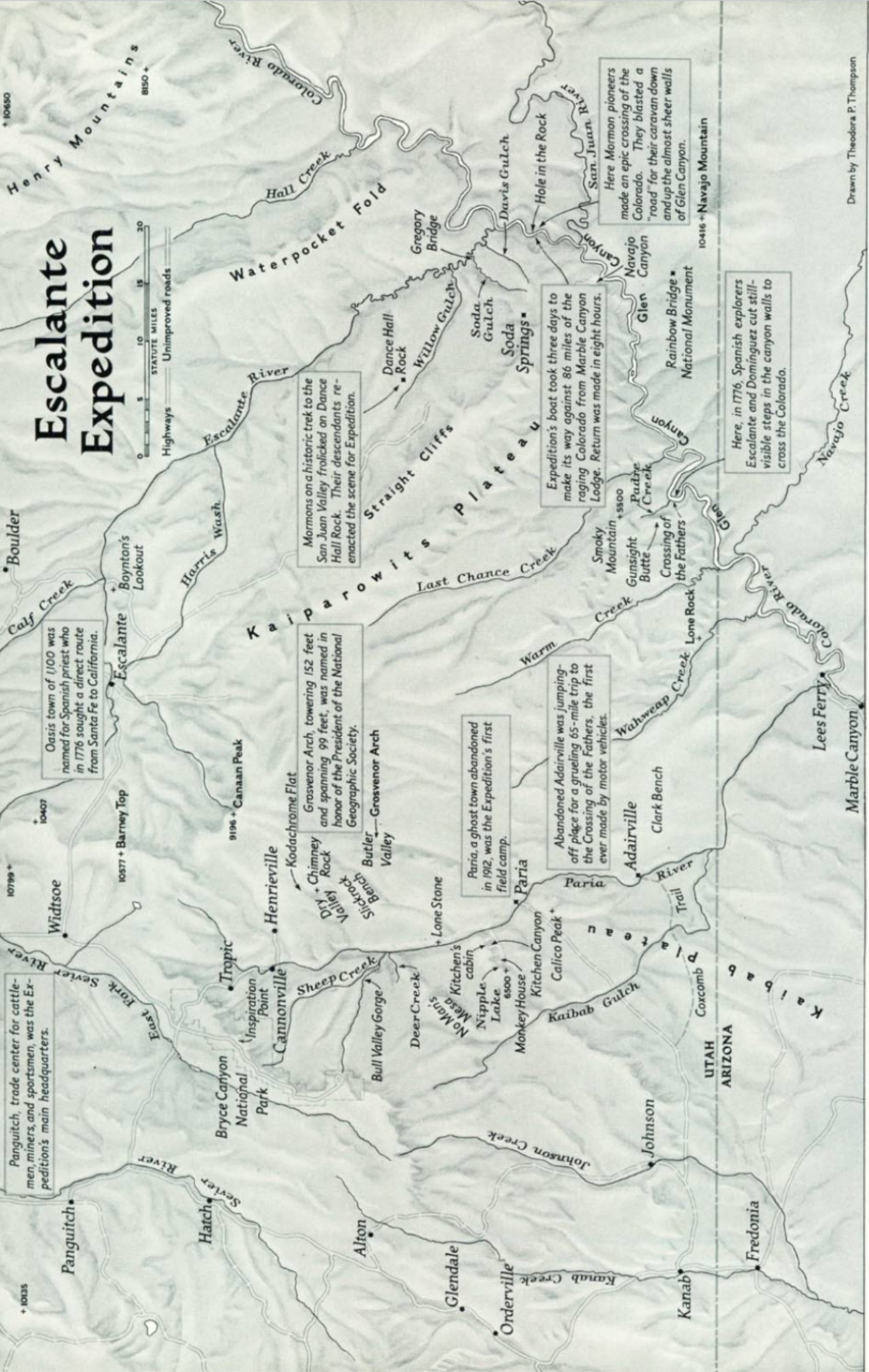
Grosvenor Arch, towering 152 feet and spanning 99 feet, was named in honor of the President of the National Geographic Society.

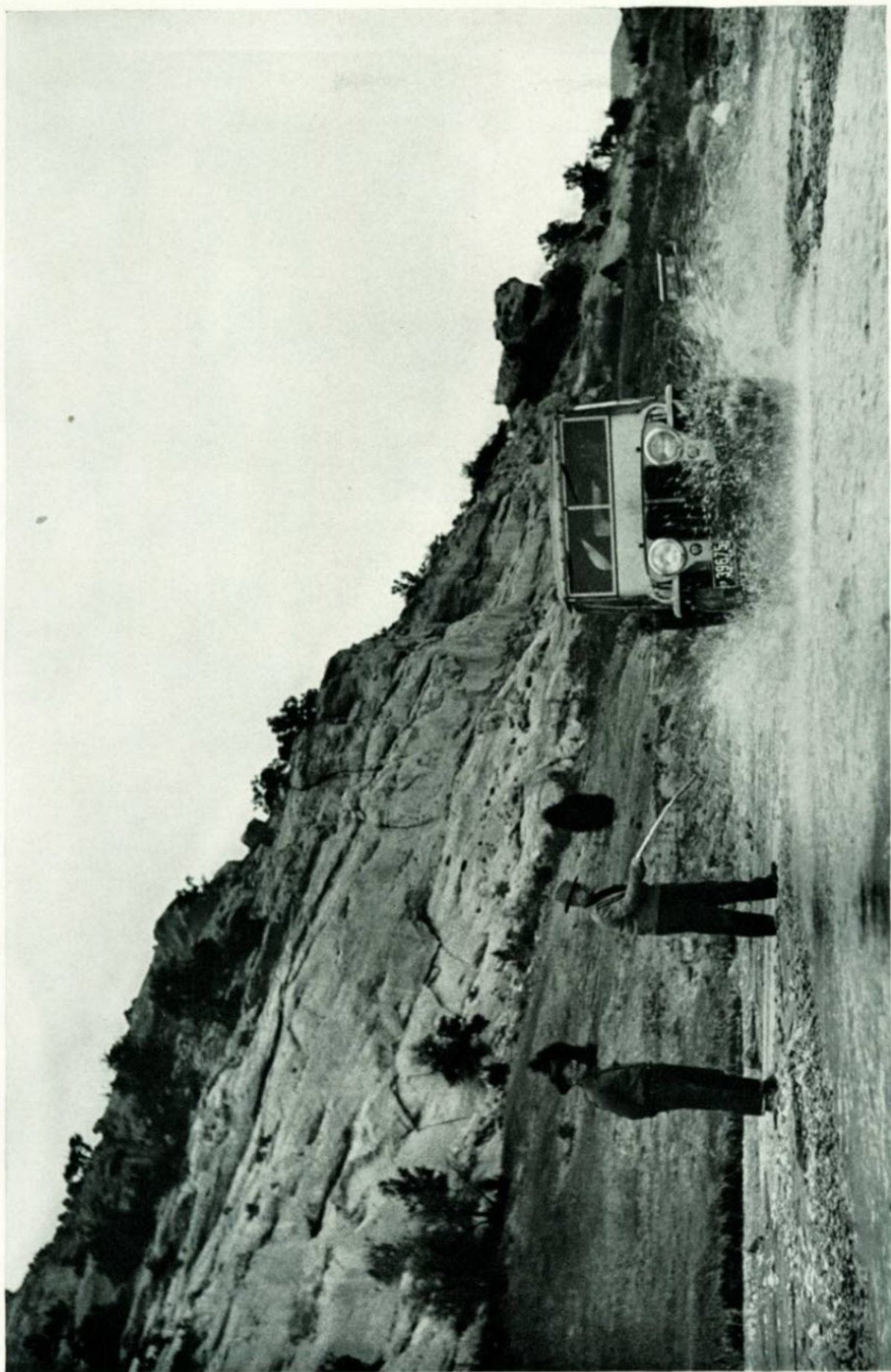
Paria, a ghost town abandoned in 1912, was the Expedition's first field camp.

Abandoned Adairville was jumping-off place for a grueling 65-mile trip to the Crossing of the Fathers, the first ever made by motor vehicles.

Here Mormon pioneers made an epic crossing of the Colorado. They blasted a "road" for their caravan down and up the almost sheer walls of Glen Canyon.

Here, in 1776, Spanish explorers Escalante and Domínguez cut still-visible steps in the canyon walls to cross the Colorado.





Where Cars Had Never Rolled Before, Jeeps Send Spray Flying as They Plow Across a Rocky Stream Bed

Miring quicksand and hidden rocks made fording risky. Before each crossing men waded and probed with sticks to find a safe path. Then they lined up to point the way. The low-slung station wagon usually led; if it stuck, jeeps or trucks could pull it back for another try.



Navajos Dubbed This Colorado River Craft "the Trail to the Rock That Goes Over"

The fanciful name describes the boat's workaday job, speeding sight-seers from Art Greene's Marble Canyon Lodge on trips to Rainbow Bridge. Powered by airplane motor and propeller, it can make 30 miles an hour against the river's strong current. Here, while their wives watch, Greene and friends prepare to join the Escalante Expedition at Hole in the Rock. When this engine developed trouble, an outboard motor fought the craft upriver in a three-day ordeal (page 401).

feet deep with a grade of about 70 percent. The truck had plowed right over the rim!

Rollie Allen had had no forewarning of just how far that dune dropped; and when he had finally realized the situation it was too late to back up.

From the front seat of the jeep it looked as if we were going to drop right on top of the truck, so steep was the incline.

"How are we going to get back up that dune?" I asked Tom Smith, looking at the towering mass of sheer sand walls on three sides of us.

"Why, them four-wheeled critters will climb a greased pole," said Tom, looking, nevertheless, a bit concerned.

All hands agreed that this was no time to think about going back. We could worry about that problem later.

On went the cars toward the crossing, crash-

ing over ledges, fighting back over stream banks as high as a house, and driving through hub-deep sand. Near Gunsight Butte the sand began to take its toll. The truck, constantly overheated by the strain, was boiling steadily and began to vapor-lock.

"One stall and we're sunk," said Don Moffitt.

In a matter of seconds the truck stalled. Rollie Allen pitched right in under the hood to work on the locked engine, while others scouted around on foot to find the hardest sand. Precious water was used to soak rags with which to cool the fuel pump and gas line.

In half an hour the engine sputtered, wheezed, and started up again. Hendrix, Allen Cameron, Tom Smith, and I kept several hundred yards ahead in the jeep trying to spot the easiest way. For three miles it was all uphill—a gradual slope through soft, pink



Careful Loading Squeezes 3,000 Pounds of Gear into Expedition "Headquarters"

From rooftop to tail gate no usable space was wasted. On the trail, the specially equipped station wagon served as photographic lab, two-way radio center, and chuck wagon (page 372). Old-timers balked at using its built-in bed with innerspring mattress.

sand that had not been packed down by rain for weeks.

Once on the crest of this broad plain, we had an easy glide down the other side into another stream bed. Again all I could think of was going back up those dunes!

We inched around the end of Gunsight Butte, dropping over three-foot ledges, stopping now and then to fill in some of the larger breaks with rocks to make it easier for the cars.

Several times, while we struggled to hold the car from slipping into some gorge, the vehicle would tip up on two wheels.

"The farther you go, the better the road gets," roared Tom Smith as we rammed full speed into a troublesome embankment. He was beginning to feel we might make it.

Then came Padre Creek, which looked impossible to "head," and I thought we'd have to leave the cars and hike.

"Nothing doing," said driver Hendrix, who

handled the jeep like a baby carriage. "We'll get there."

How we fought the jeep through the last five miles is a nightmare none of us wants to remember. I can only recall jumping out several times when it seemed certain the plucky vehicle would roll over into an abyss.

Rocky Road on Edge of Eternity

We conquered grades that would stop a tank, skirted ledges and boulders that tore chunks from the fenders as well as the tires, and bashed the undercarriage unmercifully on jutting rocks.

In an hour we *had* headed Padre Creek, and before us was a run of only a mile to the promontory where Escalante had dropped to the canyon floor. The car plowed over the sagebrush like a breeze and in a matter of minutes slid to a stop on the brink of Padre Creek a few yards above its junction with the Colorado.



Local Cowmen Guided the Expedition in Wild Escalante Land

Only a handful of ranchers like Tom Smith (left) and John Johnson (right), hunting new grazing grounds or lost cattle, ever penetrate the forbidding country. Here they pick up a few pointers from author-cameraman Breed during loading operations in Tropic, Utah.



Hunting Rock Souvenirs, She Made a Rich Uranium Strike

Maggie Riley, of Marble Canyon, Arizona, collects unusual rocks and petrified wood to sell to tourists. Here she shows her daughter a sample from the uranium deposit she stumbled on in near-by Escalante Country. A Government assayer told her it was top-grade ore.



Refugees from a Sandstorm Shake the Dust from Their Gear Outside a Comfortable Lodge in Kanab

When black clouds and gusty winds foretold a violent desert storm, the outfit beat a hasty retreat (page 379). In Whit Parry's Lodge they washed off spotty "tans" in hot showers, smacked their lips over broiled mountain trout. Next morning, in clear weather, they hit the trail again.

Near by was a small rock cairn, built by exploring "river rats" to mark the historic crossing. Actually, Escalante's roughhewn steps were a short distance across the Creek and his final crossing a few hundred yards southeast.

Carrying the flags of the National Geographic Society and the Explorers Club, of New York, the jeep became the first vehicle in history, so far as records show, to reach the Crossing of the Fathers (page 394).

It had been two hours since we had seen the truck, eight miles back, and while we were congratulating ourselves on our feat, we began to wonder when and where the rest of the group had given up. We should have known better. Within 15 minutes, whooping and roaring, the party drove down the slope to the cairn.

It was an unbelievable sight to see these two vehicles sitting on the rim of Glen Canyon at the historic crossing—a point which those few who had been there had thought accessible only by a rugged pack or boat trip.

For almost an hour the group explored Padre Canyon, marveled at the scenery, and examined the actual rock steps, still plainly visible, cut by Escalante in the sandstone. Returning to the cairn, we ceremoniously signed our names on a film wrapper, described our mode of transportation, and buried the document in a tobacco can beneath the rocks.

"I'd sure like to see Norm Nevills's face when he sees these tire tracks up here," commented Don Moffitt.

When I met some of the boatmen a few weeks later, they were all wondering how anyone had managed to get a car in there!

Getting Out Harder than Getting In

Getting in had been accomplished. Getting out was something else again. Everyone shuddered at the thought of those sand hills and dunes. The sun was sinking and shadows were long when we started back.

All went well until 8 o'clock. Then we reached the first long stretch of sand. Now by faint twilight we all struggled to fight the cars up the slopes.

Time and again Rollie Allen angled the truck up the slope as hard as he could. Each time the vehicle bogged down to the fenders. Eight men shoved to keep it moving. Even the jeep slithered helplessly in the churned-up sand.

Each run, however, brought the truck a little closer to the top of the grade. After an hour of trying, we conquered the first slopes.

We now discovered we had burned out the battery in the truck and the generator in the

jeep. Flashlights would have to light the trail. In the darkness we fought the cars back toward the mouth of Warm Creek, where the worst dunes waited.

Could we make it? Or would the cars be abandoned to the drifting sands of the desert?

First, the truck tackled the almost sheer dune. Men were stationed in pairs every 20 yards to grab hold and push.

Up and Over a 200-foot Dune

Allen backed the truck as far across the bottom wash as he could for a running start and hit the dune full throttle. He came ahead so fast that no one had a chance to push. To everyone's amazement, the truck never faltered and capped the 200-foot dune unaided.

On the jeep's first attempt it hit a hidden boulder and slid off the side of the embankment. All hands shoveled and lifted to put the car back on course. Then it, too, zoomed over the dune.

Tom Smith cheered us once more with his now familiar comment that "the farther you go the better the road gets!"

From Warm Creek on there was little difficulty. By midnight we made the Survey camp at Lone Rock and bedded down. At sunrise quick repairs were made on the cars, and on we went into Adairville.

Never had the comfort and convenience of my station wagon been so welcome. In no time the gas stove was blazing on the tail gate and hot cereal and coffee were being devoured by all hands.

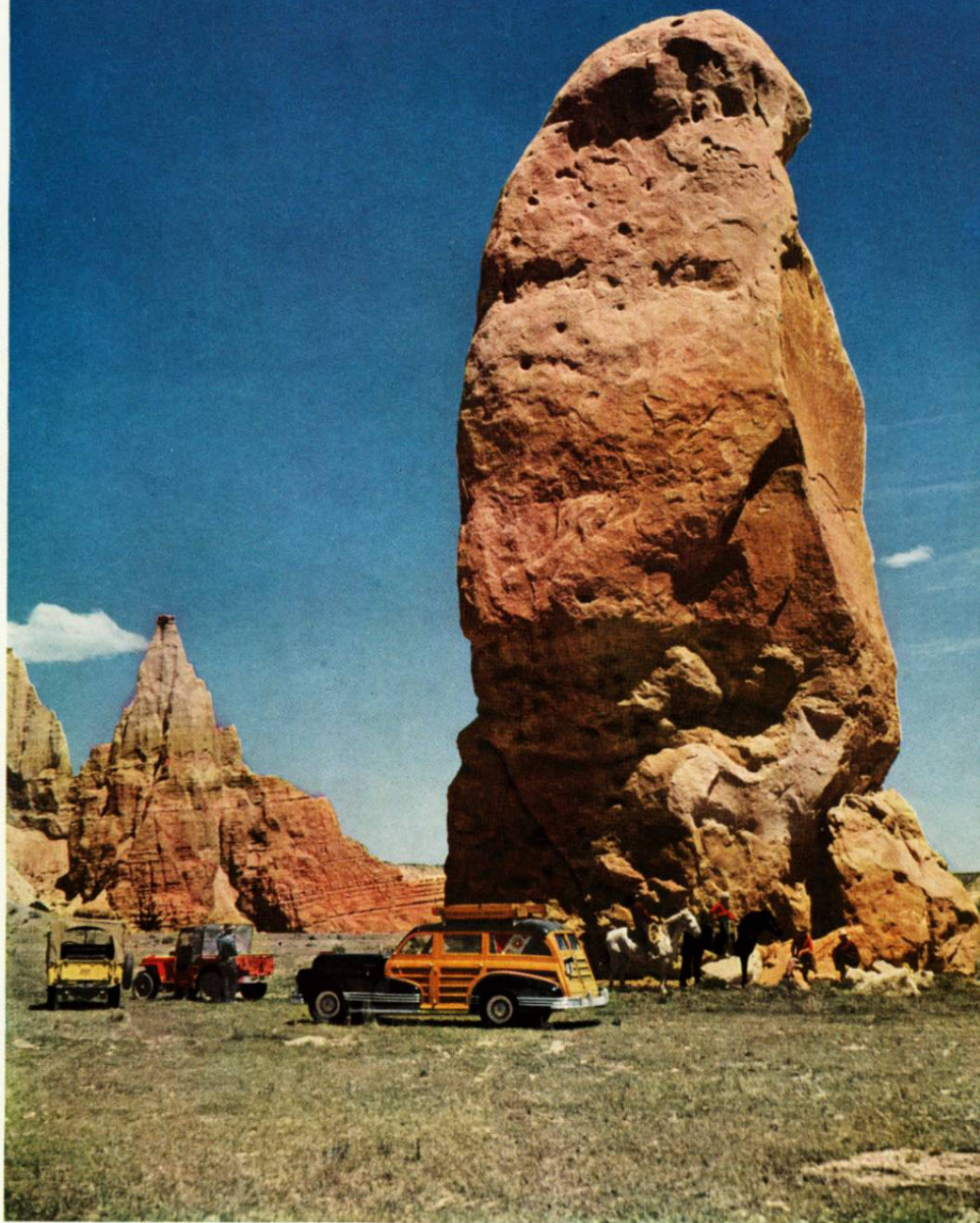
The superb drivers of the truck and the jeep, Rollie Allen and Burnett Hendrix, deserved a special breakfast. Thanks to them, we had made it to the Crossing of the Fathers—and back!

Bisecting the 10,000-square-mile area of the Escalante Country is a long, slender tableland called the Kaiparowits Plateau, which runs southeasterly for nearly 60 miles from the town of Escalante.

For the first few weeks our Escalante Expedition had been concentrating its field work to the west and south of this massive promontory. For the second half of the field work our base camp was moved to the north side of the Kaiparowits near the end of the mesa at Soda Springs.

Here rancher Clark Veator of Escalante had set up a tiny log cabin at the mouth of a natural rock corral (page 396). All feed and supplies were trucked 60 miles down the rugged trail from Escalante, a verdant oasis with a town of 1,100 people, named in honor of Father Escalante.

Forty miles below Escalante, on the trail to



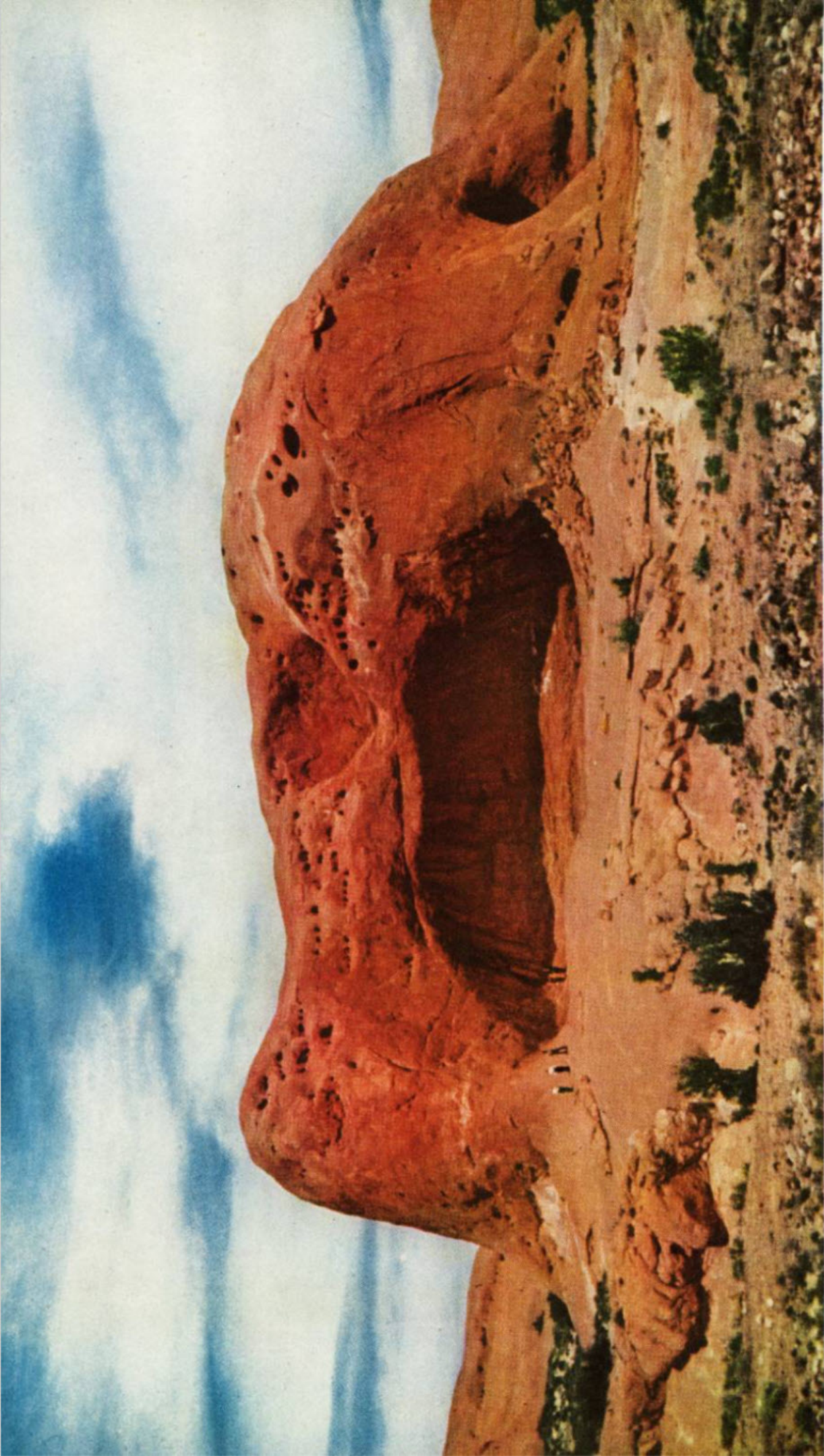
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Ektachrome by Jack Breed

In Earth's Age-old Battle with the Elements, Giant Chimney Rock Stands Undefeated

Expedition members take time out at the base of the massive monolith towering 90 feet above the floor of Dry Valley (page 377). The rock was left when an inland sea drained and carried off less resistant material.



In This Natural Amphitheater "San Juan Saints" on a Heroic Trek Danced by the Light of a Desert Moon

Dance Hall Rock marks an encampment of 256 pioneers who set out in December, 1879, to settle the San Juan River Valley across the Colorado in Utah's wild southeast corner. Overcoming almost insurmountable obstacles, they reached their goal in a grueling trek that made Mormon history (pages 401 and 402).

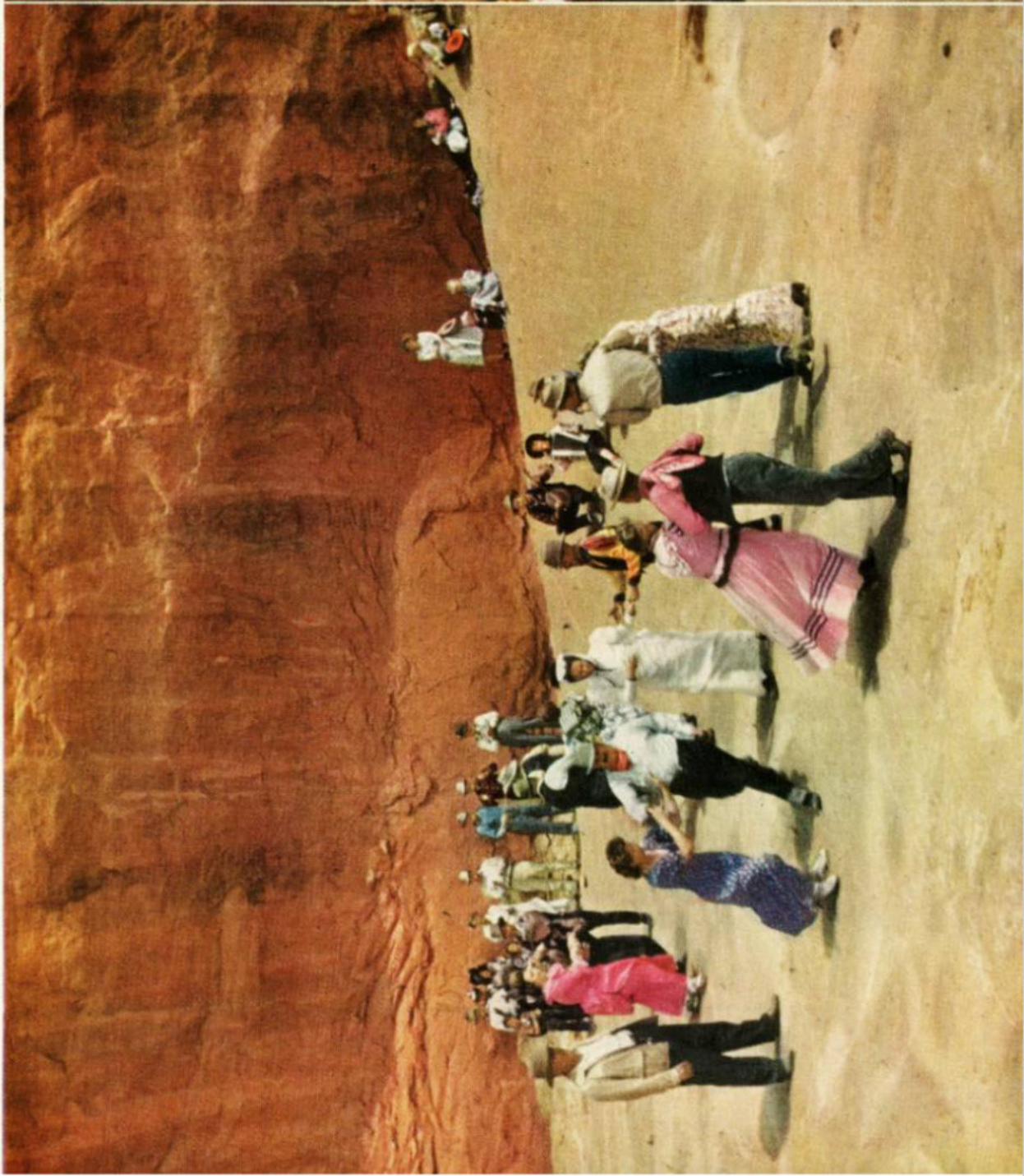
"Promenade!" "Ladies Chain!" Dance Hall Rock Echoes to Mountain Music and Dancing Feet as It Did 70 Years Ago

For the Expedition, descendants of the Mormon pioneers re-enacted their forefathers' dance in its original setting (above). So difficult is the 40-mile trip from Escalante that most of the dancers were seeing the Rock for the first time. Many of the women donned dresses their grandmothers wore when they frolicked here.

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Kodachrome by Jack Breed



Ektachrome by Jack Breed



In Treacherous Paria River Canyon, Expedition Scouts Probe a Quicksand Trap That Failed To Bog Their Sturdy Jeep

Sand flying, four wheels driving, the jeep churned through without faltering. Jutting out of the almost dry stream bed is Lone Stone, a "road marker" for local cattlemen.

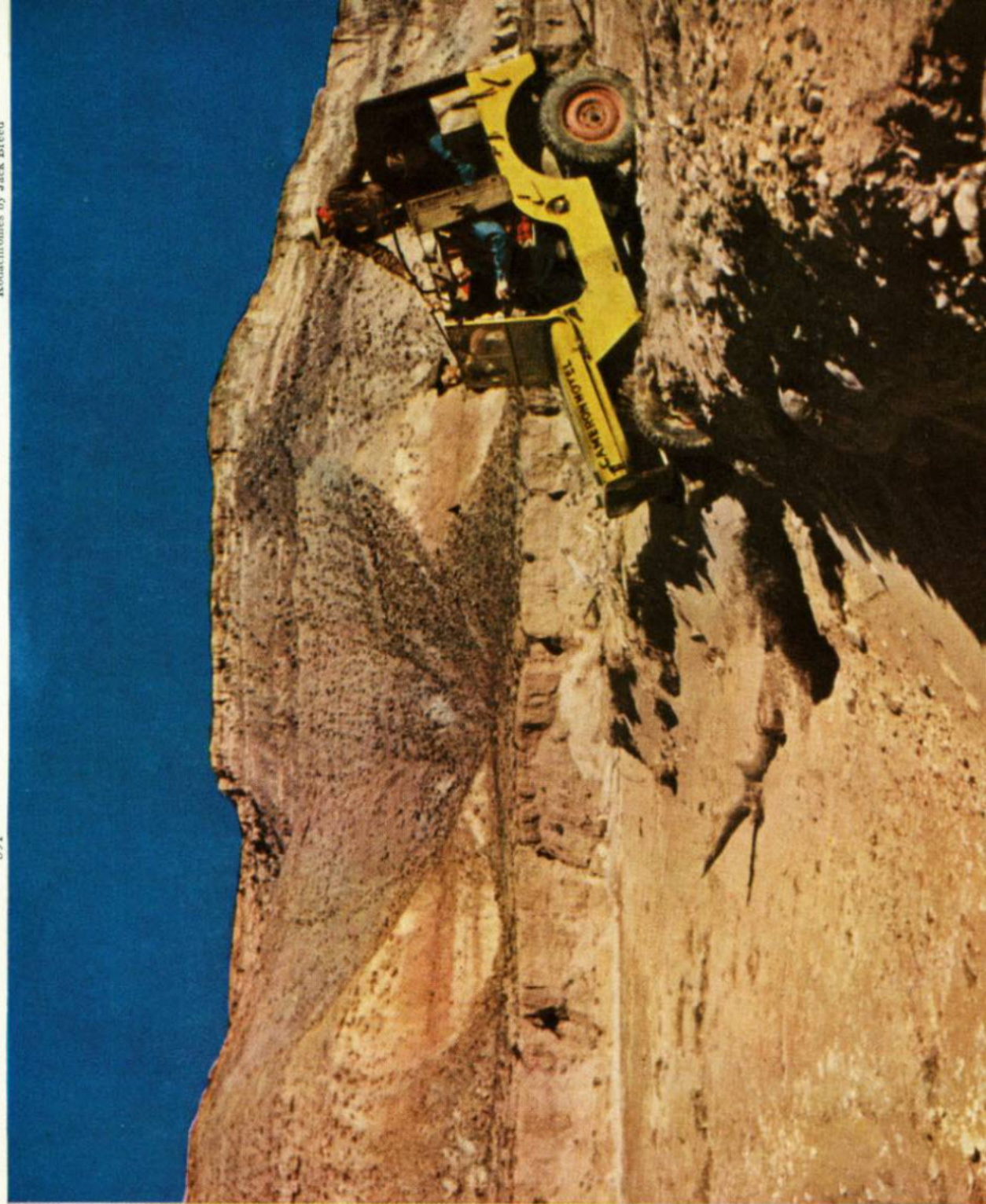
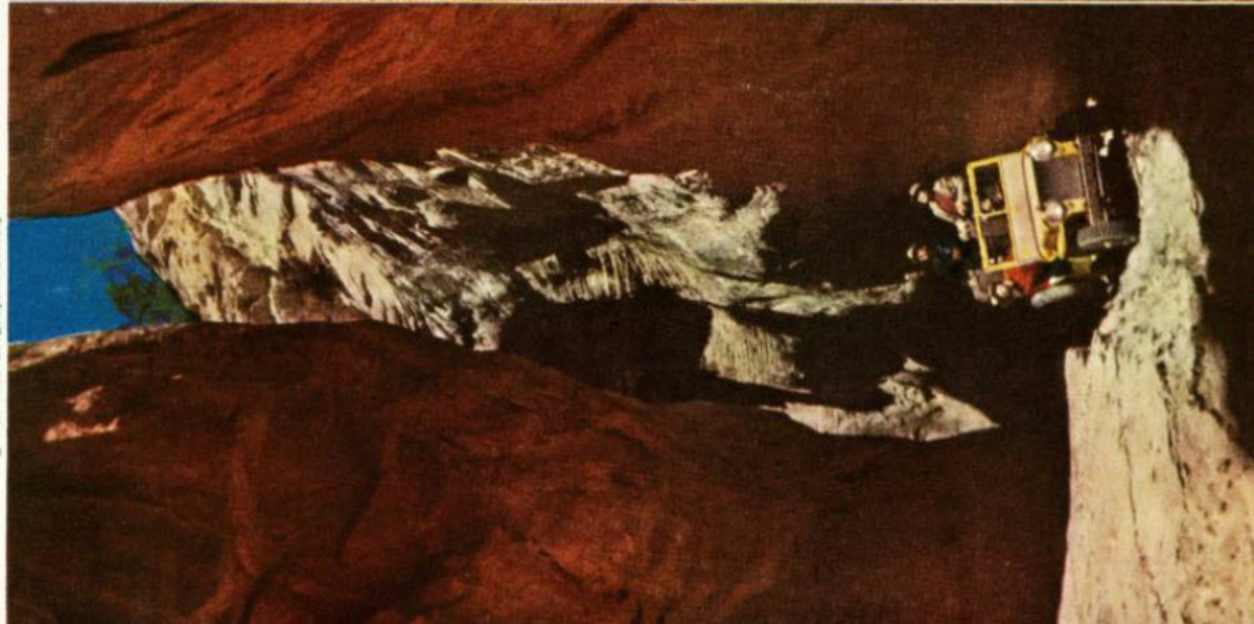
Powerful Four-wheel Drive Takes Slitlike Gorges or Jolting Stream Banks in Stride

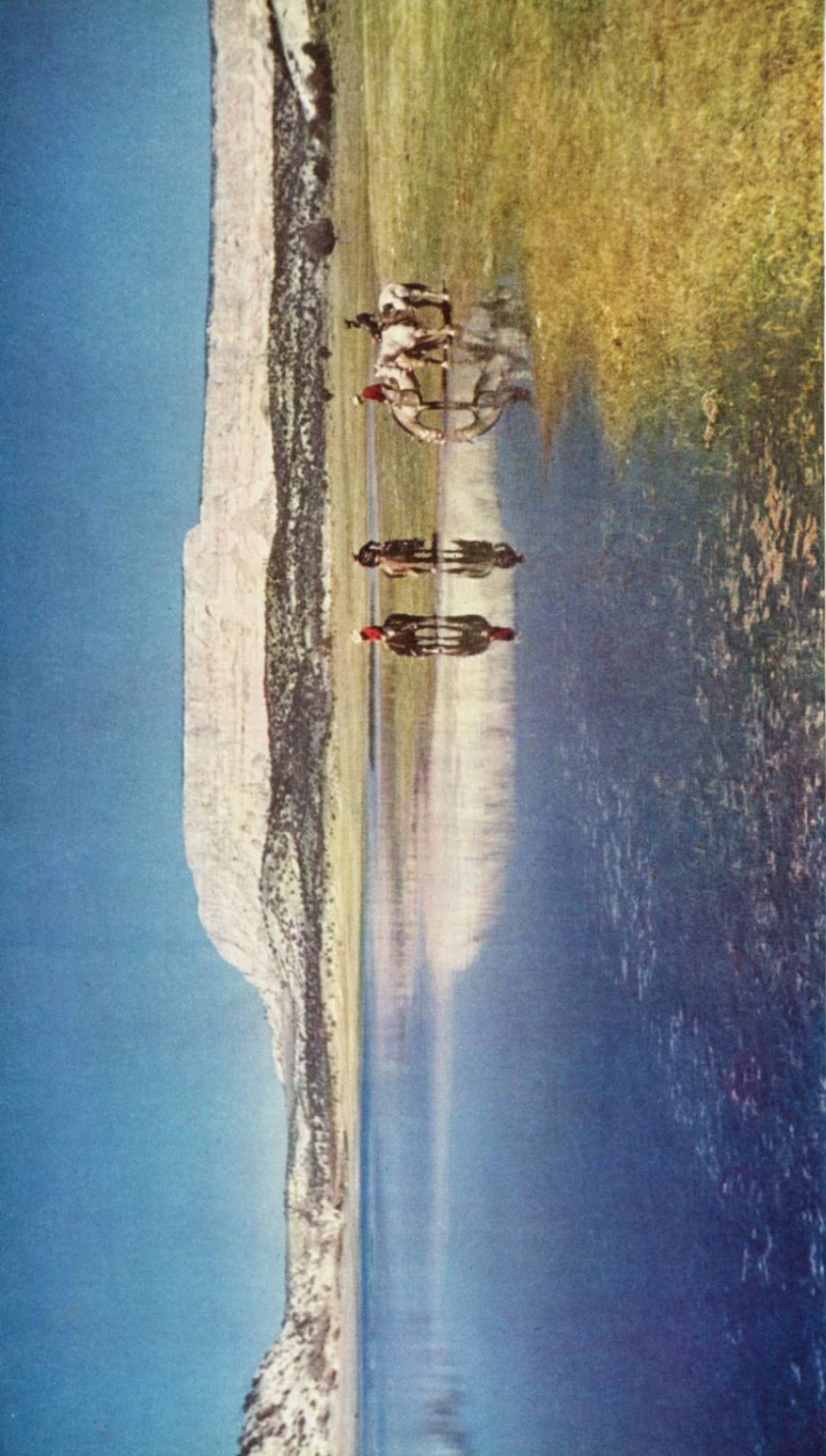
Jouncing down Paria River Valley, the car nosed into any side canyon that looked inviting. Only dead-end gorges made it back up. Dropping down embankments was easy; battling up again usually took two jarring tries, one to batter down enough loose sand and stone to form a ramp for the second run to go over the top.

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Kodachromes by Jack Breed





After the Sand and Dust of Paria Canyon, Men and Horses Found Hidden Nipple Lake an Explorer's Eden

No mirage was the refreshing water, isolated and almost unknown. Cowmen know the white mountain behind it as No Man's Mesa, for it long defied all attempts to find a way to its top. Recently one of the Expedition's guides blazed a trail. Covered with thick forage, the mesa top makes a fine fenceless cattle range.

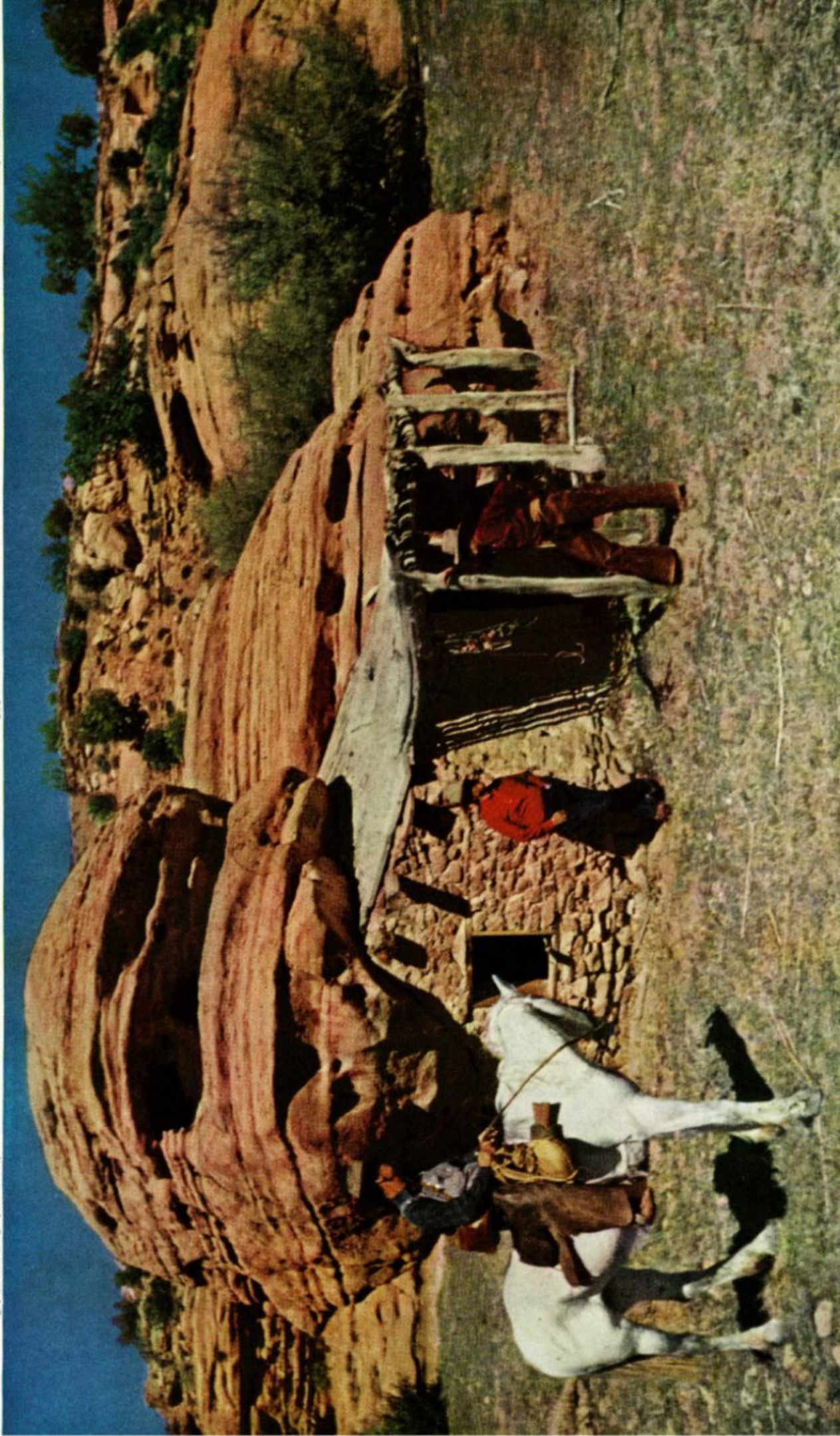
No Architect Ever Fitted a Home into Its Surroundings Better than the Builder of This Cabin-in-a-cliff

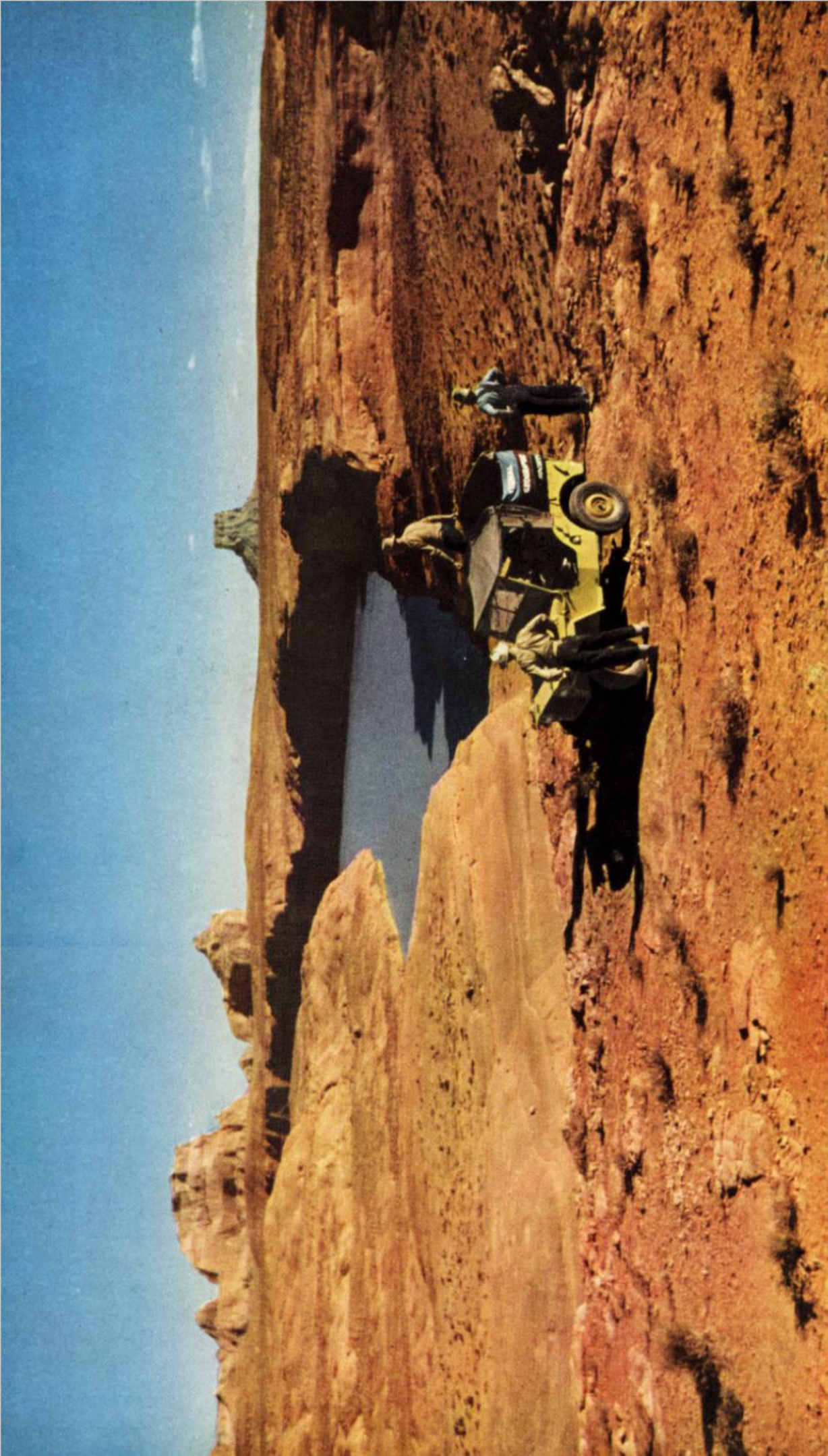
Local cowman Dick Woolsey built the semi-dugout in 1896. There he lived for 15 years with his wife and a large monkey, which had its own house atop a pole. Seeing a stranger riding up the valley, the pet would chatter wildly. "Monkey House," as the place was called, became famous all over southern Utah.

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Desert Victory: a Jeep Makes Expedition History by Battling to the Colorado River's Historic "Crossing of the Fathers"

Triumphant over 65 killing miles, the tough little car was the first to reach this point. To cross the river in 1776, exploring Spaniards under Fathers Escalante and Dominguez hewed in canyon walls steps which are still visible. Finding a place where they could ford the mighty Colorado had taken them 25 discouraging days.

Narrow Walls and Deep Water Thwarted the Explorers in Nightmarish Soda Gulch

Tales of arches "bigger than Rainbow Bridge" sent the Expedition exploring unknown branches of Escalante Canyon. Most treacherous was forbidding Soda Gulch, never before explored, according to local records.

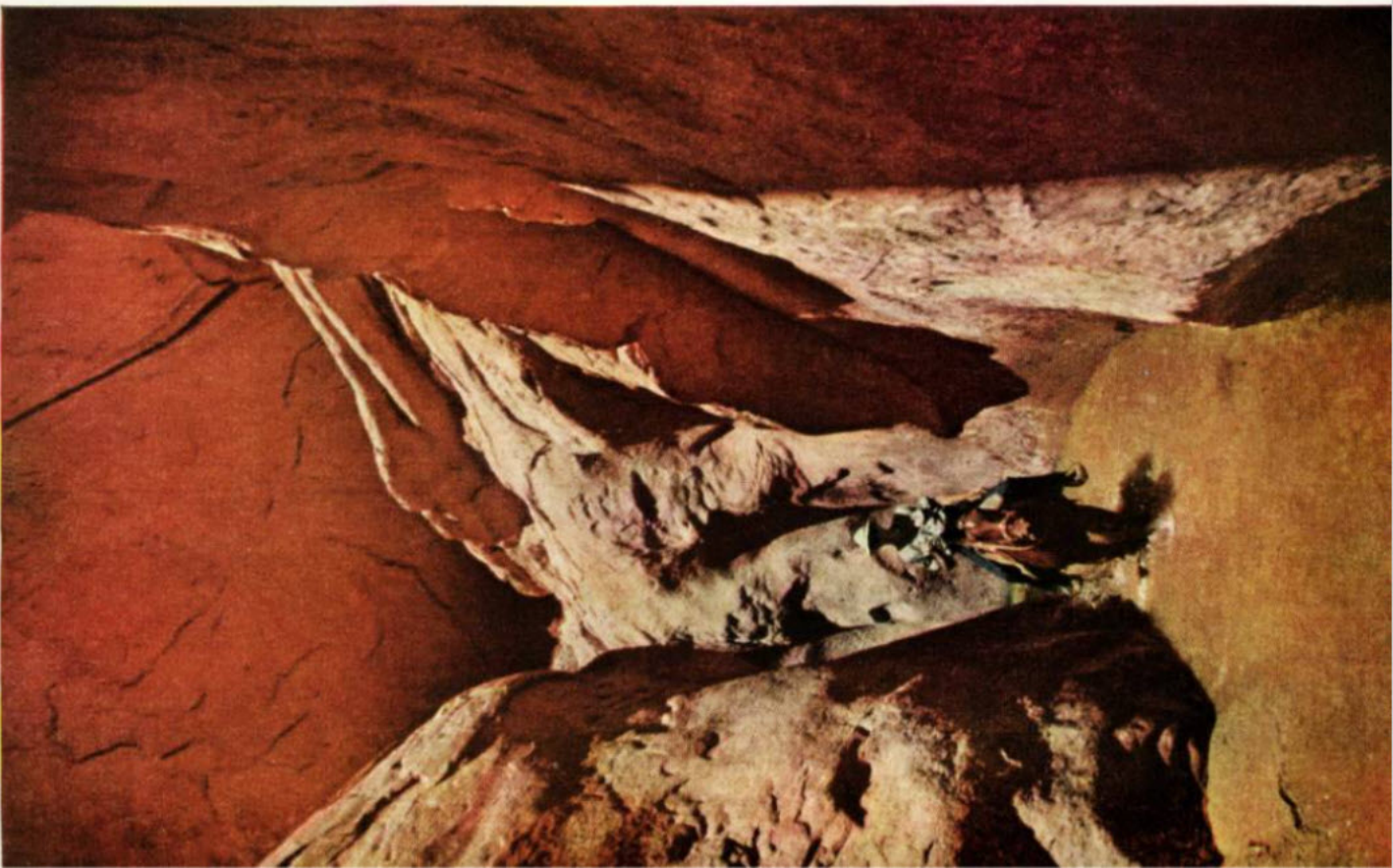
The first few miles were easy riding. Then the gulch closed in to a scant four feet. Suddenly a mare bogged to her belly in quicksand; only prompt efforts saved her.

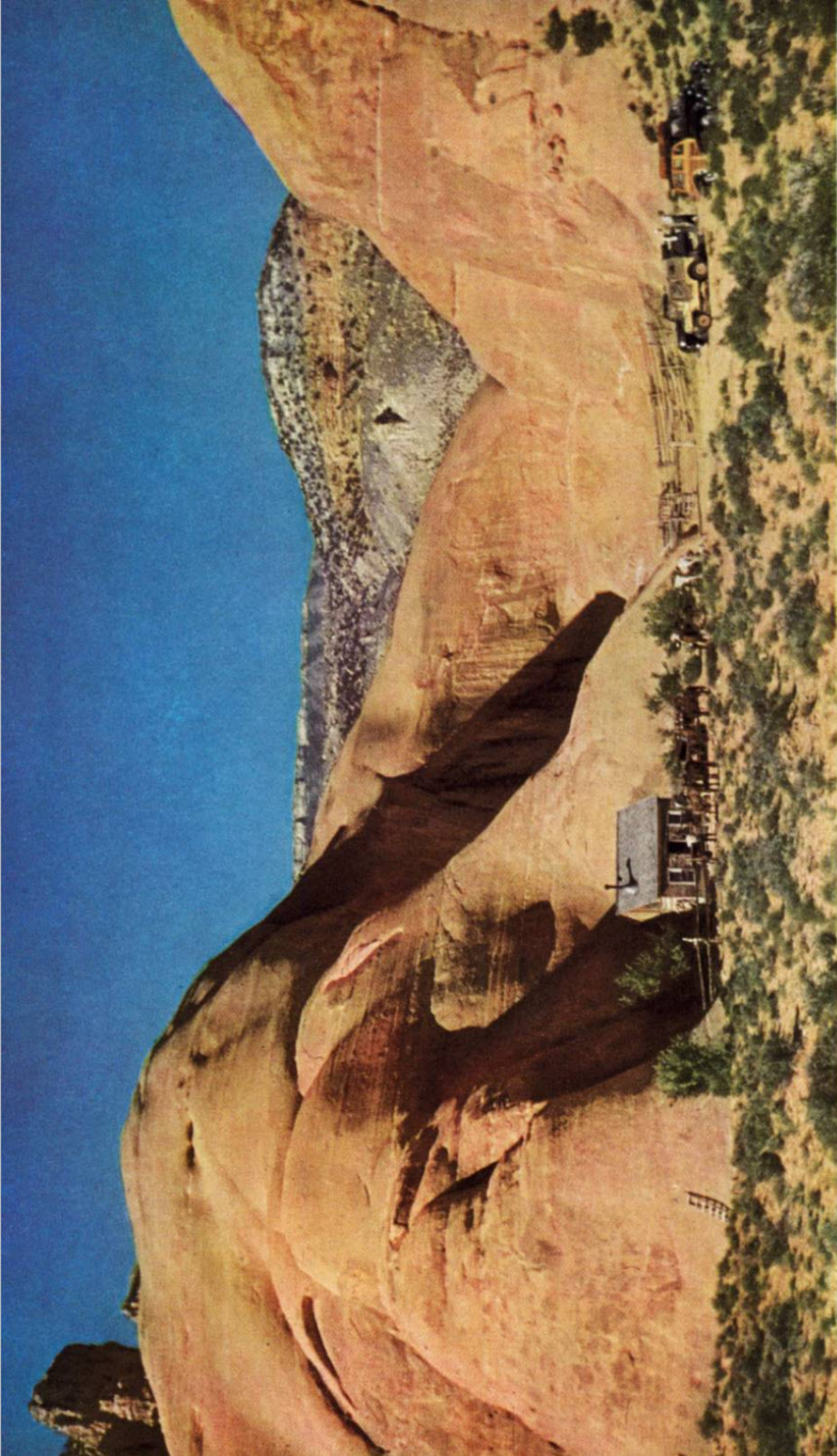
Pushing on afoot, the men discarded piece after piece of equipment and clothing as the going became rougher. Closing walls, more than 500 feet high, squeezed streams to over-the-head depths, finally forced retreat.

Camera under hat, the author swam these rock-lined "canals." Kelly Cameron kept dry by "bridging" them—inch-ing sideways with hands and feet on opposite walls. A slip would have meant bad bruises and a cold ducking.

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Snuggled into Time-worn Cliffs, Base Camp at Soda Springs Looked Like a Rustler's Hide-out in a Hollywood Western

Piece by piece a rancher packed the old settler's cabin in from Escalante, 60 miles away, and set it up as his field headquarters. A hidden spring provides water. From this base the Expedition ranged large areas of the Kaiparowits Plateau (background) and Escalante Canyon, and reached Hole in the Rock (page 402).

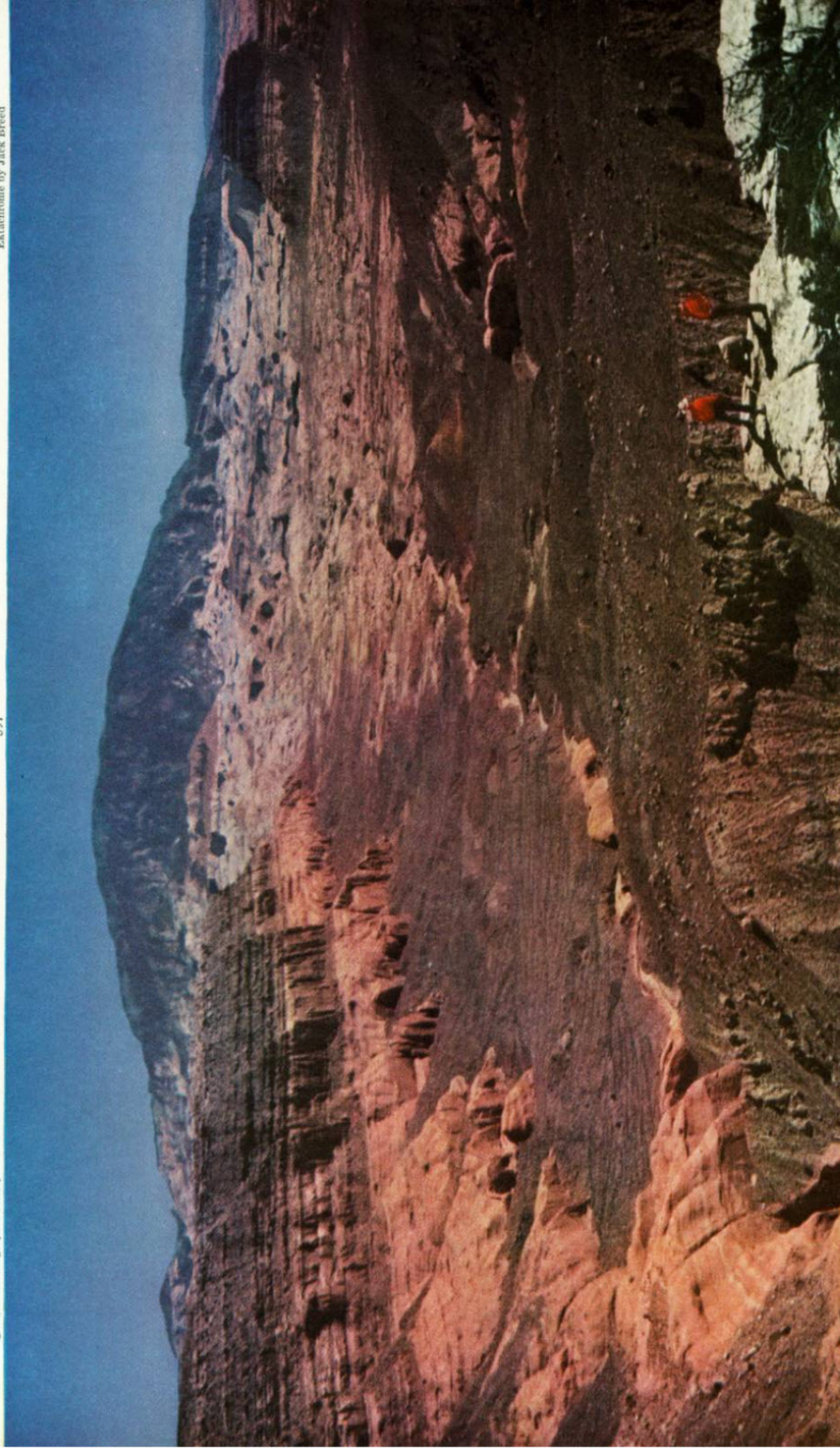
Only a Handful of White Men Have Seen This View of Round-shouldered Navajo Mountain, Home of an Indian Thunder God

Countless tourists have seen the 10,416-foot dome from Bryce Canyon National Park. To see it from this side requires a rugged pack trip to the top of Kaiparowits Plateau. Between the mountain and the plateau (left) flows the Colorado River, 2,000 feet down in its gorge. Navajo Canyon (foreground) drops into it.

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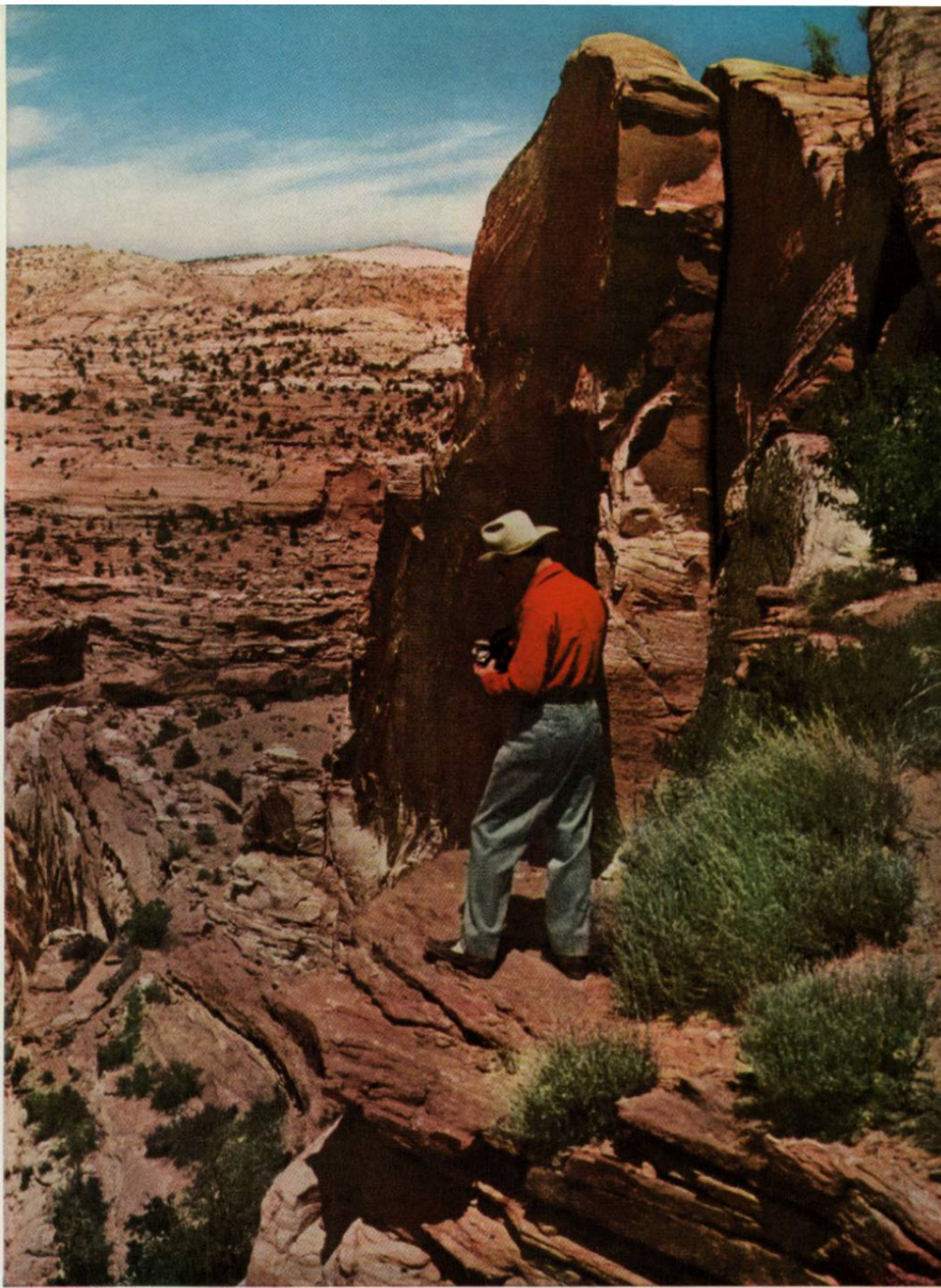
Ektachrome by Jack Breed





From Boynton's Lookout the Author Photographs the Grandeur of Escalante Canyon

The deep chasm, typical of Escalante Land, winds southeast to join the Colorado River's Glen Canyon near Hole in the Rock. Boynton, a desperado of the 1870's, was murdered near here.



Far Below, Calf Creek Spills into Shrunken Escalante River Beside a Highway Bridge
Near this lookout the road drops some 1,500 feet in zigzags to the span. On the other side it climbs crazily to the mesa-top town of Boulder. Until 1935 Boulder was a "pack-horse town," inaccessible except by pack train.

On Its Sloping Shoulders "Calico Peak" Wears a Billowing Shawl of Rainbow Colors

Since no name for the towering butte was known, members of the Expedition gave it one suggested by the brightly colored dresses Navajo matrons wear.

Top and shoulders are of sandstone. Below, erosion has exposed a multicolored outcropping that geologists call a "Chinle formation."

Such brilliant, barren outcroppings are common in western New Mexico, northern Arizona, and southern Utah. Best known is the Painted Desert in Arizona.

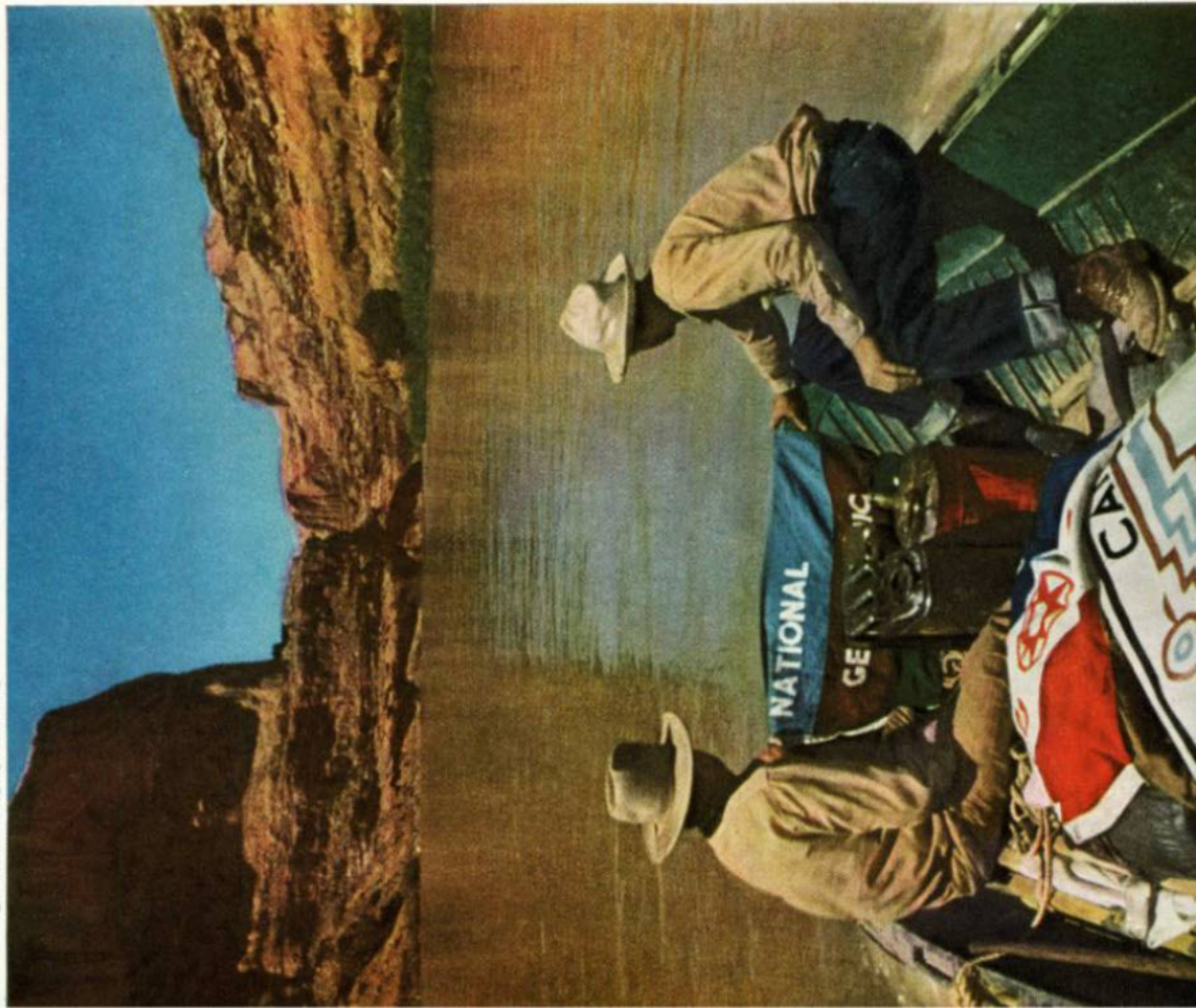
A scouting party, roaming far in the jeep, discovered Calico Peak near the Paria River.

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Bucking Ol' Man Colorado Was a Three-mile-an-hour Grind
To meet the Expedition at Hole in the Rock (right), Art Greene and Earl Johnson fought swift current and churning "sand waves" for three days.

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Exploring Flags Unfurl Beneath a Plaque to Mormon Courage
National Geographic Society and Explorers Club, of New York, banners salute the epic Colorado River crossing of Jan. 26, 1880, at Hole in the Rock (p. 402).

Kodachromes by Jack Breed





Through Historic Hole in the Rock Mormons Blasted a Path to Their Promised Land

To cross the Colorado, the pioneers hacked and dynamited steps for their caravan down and up the 1,500-foot walls of Glen Canyon. Expedition members used them to pack fuel to Art Greene's boat (page 401).

Soda Springs, we passed a huge natural rock amphitheater called Dance Hall Rock (page 388). In the '80's Mormon pioneers camped here with their families en route to Hole in the Rock. By the light of a desert moon they danced nightly on the smooth sandstone to the music of Sam Cox's fiddle.

Our many friends in Escalante, some dressed in the actual costumes worn by their grandparents 70 years ago, gathered together one Sunday and trucked down to the rock. With the aid of a three-piece orchestra the happy folk re-enacted for us the dances performed by their ancestors.

Dance Hall Rock Comes Back to Life

For several hours the rock amphitheater came back to life and echoed to the cadence of clapping hands, cheering voices, and the rhythm of the banjo (page 389). Then at dusk the Mormon families climbed back into their trucks for the 40-mile jaunt home. The expedition went on to camp at Soda Springs, and Dance Hall Rock returned to its isolated quiescence.

At Soda Springs our group split up into several sections to tackle the many projects we contemplated in the area. Art Greene and Earl Johnson, from Marble Canyon Lodge in Arizona, were to meet us at Hole in the Rock, on the Colorado. They were bringing a boat upstream 86 miles to pick us up and take us by water to the mouth of the Escalante River.

Greene's job was not an easy one. In late spring the Colorado is a fighting torrent, swelled by melting snows and spring rains. Sand waves six feet high are likely to rise suddenly and swamp a craft.

The overland party set forth in jeeps to drive to historic Hole in the Rock to effect the meeting. It was about like the trip to the Crossing of the Fathers all over again. Miles of soft sand, gnarled slickrock, and deep washes had to be traversed. It took half a day to cover the eight miles from our camp at Soda.

In 1879 the Mormon Church sent a group of hardy pioneers to settle the valley of the San Juan, an isolated tributary on the east side of the Colorado River near the Arizona line.* Setting forth from Salt Lake City in late fall, the band of 256 persons toiled up the Sevier River to the settlement at Escalante, then continued along the base of the Kaiparowits to Soda Springs.

Advance scouts had reported that the party might be able to lower horses and wagons through a narrow slit in the rim of Glen Canyon to the bank of the Colorado, where a ford could be made.

The slit, which came to be known as Hole in the Rock, turned out to be only ten feet wide in places, with a drop of more than 1,500 feet! The story of how the Mormons conquered this canyon is one of the classics in the history of the West (opposite page).

Heroic Saga of Hole in the Rock

Camping on the rim in December, 1879, the men began to blast the Hole larger and cut steps to the bottom of the sheer precipice. The women kept the camp a bustle of household activity, while the older men melted snow for water. Four weeks were spent in constructing the "road" through the Hole.

On January 26, 1880, a third of the wagons were lowered to the Colorado and floated across. To make the descent, some wagons had as many as 16 braces of oxen tied to the rear to act as a brake. By February 10 the last of the wagons had crossed, and women, children, and animals soon followed.

The pioneers continued eastward, overcoming almost unbearable hardships on the other side, and six weeks later arrived in the San Juan Valley to settle such towns as Bluff, Blanding, Monticello, and Mexican Hat. Their tortuous trail through the Hole in the Rock had evidently never been used since.

We modern pioneers of the Escalante Expedition dropped through this same slit, lugging drums of gasoline and oil for Art Greene's boat. As we descended the precipice, I could not help marveling at the persistence of the Mormons. In many places the drop between steps exceeded 20 feet. The coarse and jagged boulders could tear a person's clothing to shreds in the first few yards.

Hendrix, Kel Cameron, and I made two round trips through the Hole, searching for Art Greene. On the second trip we found him. His boat had been badly buffeted by the severe current, and it had taken him three days to cover the 86 miles (pages 382 and 401). Later, on the return trip, he made it in less than eight hours!

We fought the current with a full boatload up to the mouth of the Escalante, where we set up a small camp. In short order Kel Cameron was reeling in catfish for supper.

Backtracking Through Hole in the Rock

The mouth of the Escalante proved too shallow to admit a boat and its bottom too treacherous with quicksand to permit us to enter on foot. Our only alternative was to backtrack up through the Hole and enter

* See, in the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE: "Desert River Through Navajo Land," by Alfred M. Bailey, August, 1947.

Escalante Canyon overland through one of the side gulches.

We had heard tall tales about many natural bridges and arches that supposedly were hidden in the numerous tributary canyons of the Escalante. One of our major objectives was to check the veracity of these reports, especially those that claimed the existence of bridges greater than the famous Rainbow Bridge.*

By foot and horseback we explored each canyon carefully. One group packed down Davis Gulch, only to be driven out by a wild bull that was hiding in a narrow glade.

Nightmare in Soda Gulch

Moffitt, Kel Cameron, Hendrix, and I tackled Soda Gulch, through which, to our knowledge, no man had ever passed, and almost ended the expedition right there.

Five miles from its head the canyon narrowed to only four feet. Water was pocketed between sandspits. For a while we thought we might get the horses past when suddenly Don Moffitt's mare broke through the gravelly surface into quicksand up to her belly (page 395).

Prompt coaxing on Don's part saved the horse. The rest of us urged our animals past the pitfall as best we could, but it was obvious this was no place for a horse.

Tying the animals to shady trees in a wide bend in the canyon, we continued afoot downstream.

The walls became narrower and rose more than 500 feet. The trickle of water we first encountered became squeezed to a depth of three feet, then four, and finally it was over our heads. One camera or piece of equipment after another was left behind on projecting rock shelves.

When the water topped our heads, Kel Cameron preferred to "bridge it" through the gorge, bracing his hands on one wall and his feet on the other (page 395). One slip would have meant a bad smashing on the rocks as well as a cold ducking. I put my Leica under my hat and with Hendrix ventured the cold swim.

Hours of this rugged hiking failed to disclose anything more than small windows and arches. A few hundred yards from the junction of Soda Gulch and the Escalante,

however, there is one bridge—a massive affair called Gregory Bridge after Dr. Herbert E. Gregory, who is credited with finding it. But it is no Rainbow.

On a separate pack trip Don Moffitt explored Willow Gulch and the center section of Escalante Canyon. Again small windows, arches, and one bridge were found, but nothing to bear out the claims we had heard.

In talking with ranchers who range cattle in this desolate section, we soon realized that no one could claim discovery of any of these features. The Mormons have known about them for generations. True, few people have seen them, and few ever will. It will take a long time, however, and a lot of looking before anyone finds a feature to compare with the size and symmetry of Rainbow Bridge, the 291-foot length of Landscape Arch in Arches National Monument,† or the gleaming beauty of Grosvenor Arch in Butler Valley.

By Pack Horse to a Mountain Eyrie

Our final sortie on the Escalante Expedition was by pack horse to the end of the Kaiparowits. This is another point no more than a handful of men have ever reached. The trail was steep, the water scarce, and the heat almost unbearable. But the vista from the top of this 60-mile mountain was worth every effort (page 397).

Two thousand feet below us lay ruddy Navajo Canyon. To our right was the Crossing of the Fathers; to the left, Waterpocket Fold, Escalante Canyon (pages 398-9), and the Henry Mountains. Right in front of us loomed the west face of Navajo Mountain and the gnarled maze of red canyons that debouch into the Colorado River below Rainbow Bridge.

This was the Escalante Country—vast, wild, forbidding. Agriculturally it is a wasteland, devoid of water or vegetation. For the geologist or the explorer who likes to get as far from the beaten track as he can, it is paradise.

* See, in the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE: "Encircling Navajo Mountain with a Pack Train," by Charles L. Bernheimer, February, 1923; "Great Rainbow Natural Bridge of Southern Utah," by Joseph E. Pogue, November, 1911.

† See, in the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE: "Utah's Arches of Stone," by Jack Breed, August, 1947.

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