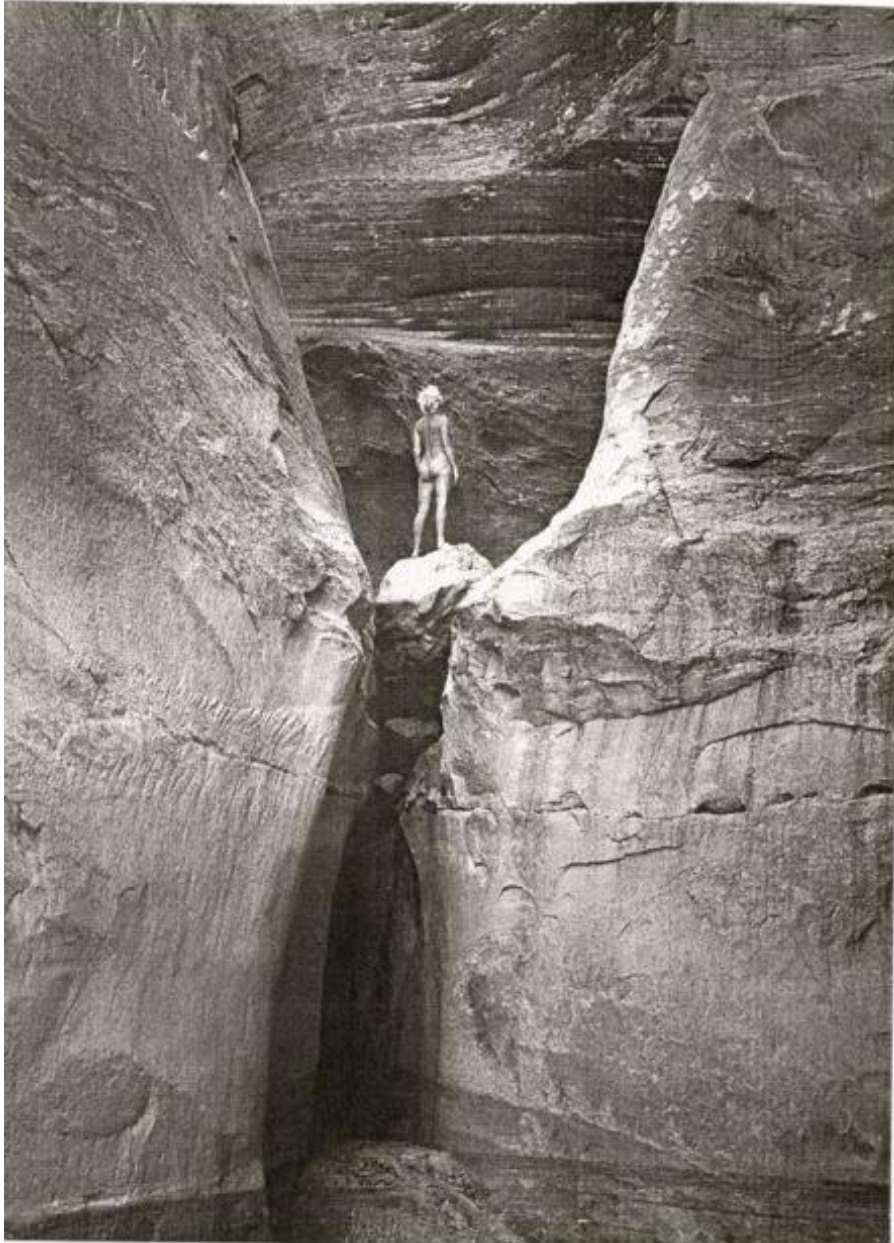


In Quest of “The Place No One Knew”

Backpacking to Paria River Canyon and Rainbow Bridger



The

Tragic Story and the Vanished Past of Glen Canyon

After the Salt Creek Canyon Adventure, I have grown feeling deeply affection for the canyon country. The ghostly image of the Anasazi petroglyphs reappeared many nights in my dreams. After returning to New York, I was determined to go back, hoping this time, I will have more time to explore the mystifying ruins up on the cliff walls. It was during the planning that I came across the controversial issue of the Glen Canyon Dam and the tragic story of Glen Canyon.

*By Chi S. Chan
May 2009*

A Place “No Mortal Ever Dare to Dream Before”

One of the most hotly topics even today concerns the continuing existence of Lake Powell. My research of the Glen Canyon Dam story led me to many interesting books, articles and photographs, introduced me to many naturalist writers, Eco-novelists, environmental organizations, and nature lovers. Most importantly, the story took me back to a place where once retained million years of unspoiled natural history and thousand years of human past. A place some time ago possessed the kind of beauty that was beyond any mortal could ever image. A place where no one really knew well until it was gone.

... we have a curious ensemble of wonderful features-carved wall, royal arches, glens, alcove gulches, mounds, and monuments. From which of these features shall we select a name? We decided to call it Glen Canyon.

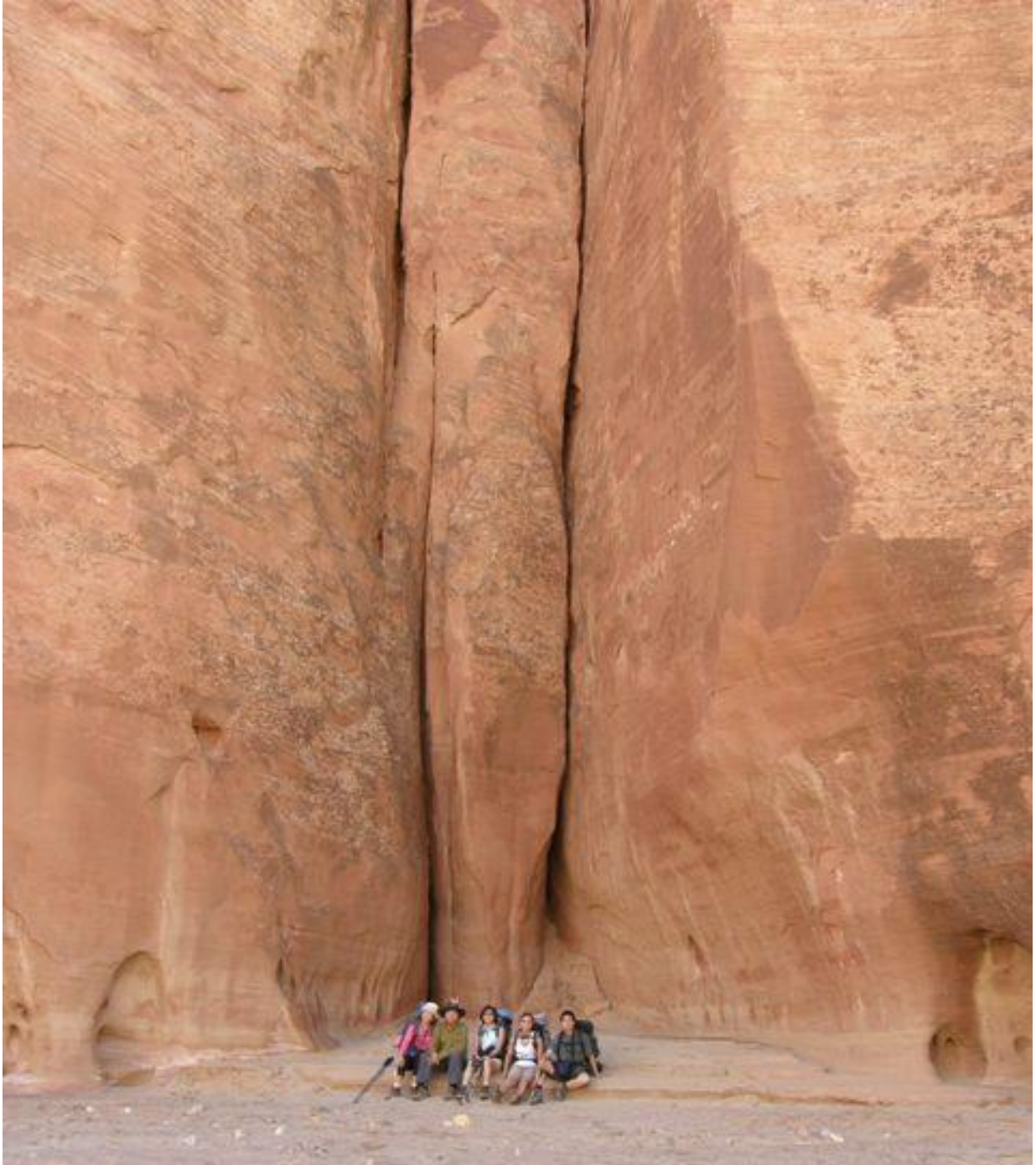
John Wesley Powell, 1869.

My curiosity of this place intensified during my research. I wanted very much to get out there, walk every narrow passage, explore each side canyon, and find out what is still left inundated of the Glen Canyon today. Somehow I sensed that in this landscape lay many challenge and dangers, but the mystery and rare beauty will reward me thousand times more.



My quest for this enigmatic land began with the backpacking trip to the Paria River Canyon. (Part 1) Six of us: H.Y, Koti, QT, Sunny, Jim and I further explored the world famous Buckskin Gulch (Part 3) and concluded our trip with a final backpacking to Rainbow Bridge. (Part 2)

Part 1 -Paria River Canyon



The walls here were so extraordinary beautiful. We were first in awe of the size of the canyon; the sheer vertical cliffs loomed above us, then the light, reflected and re-reflected from the walls. As we further penetrated into the canyon, we were festinated by its peace, quietness and delightful beauty. We could not wait to go deeper and further explore this wild, twisting and epic-length of the narrow canyon in the Southwest.



White House Trail head

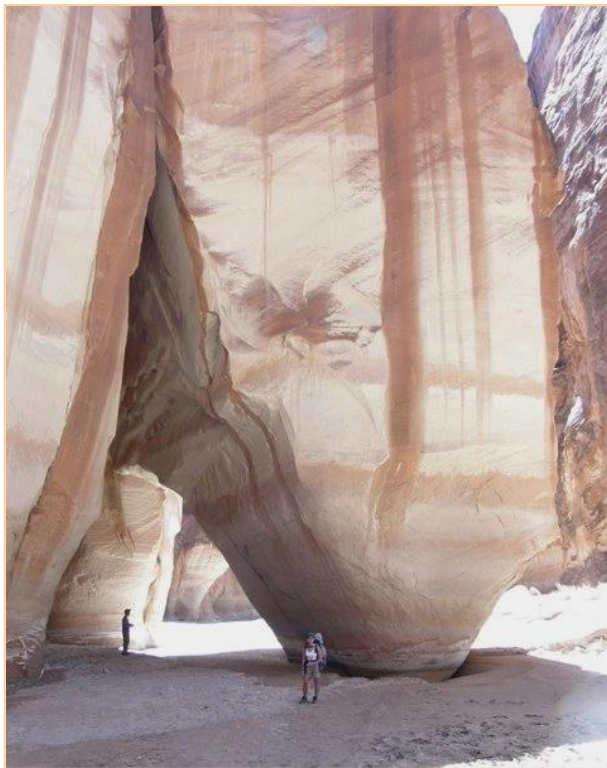
At the White House Trailhead, Betty, our shuttle driver warned us about the last section of the hike. “For the last 12 miles, you will be hiking with no shade and drinkable water. Be careful and have fun” Six of us, tightened the straps of our 35-50lbs backpacks, took a group photo and began our four days, three nights, 39 miles exciting journey.



Paria Windows

The walk started out as nothing more than a shallow desert wash in the canyon. After a mile and a half, we passed a series of low one man caves called “Windows”. Sunny, Koti and QT went in and out each window to find their own favorite. Four miles from the trailhead, it marked the entrance of the “Narrows” Here the canyon walls soared 500 feet into the sky. The stone was sheer and smooth and streaked in various shades of brown, some orange, some red, mostly light tan. I thought that was just beautiful. H.Y. was allured by some of the natural design images on the wall, “Chi, it looks like the head of a horse, or a child?” I did not quite see what he saw but something in me loved that curving and graceful images. “It looks more like a chariot H.Y.” It took a little imagination to see it, but boy, it was lovely.

The canyon wall around us continued to twist and turn, following the serpentine streambed, and with each turn came a dramatic view of tapestry wall hundreds and thousand feet high. At mile 6.5, my GPS indicated we were about to pass the “Slide Rock Arch”. This piece of enormous Navajo Sandstone is really not an arch. It is a big rock that fell from the cliff above and landed in the river bed creating a huge and beautiful “Arch”. The slab is wide at the top but thin toward the bottom. It is so huge that when QT and Koti stood under it, they both looked like little people.



Koti & QT, by the Slide Rock

Just below Slide Rock, the Narrows became really narrow. The walls pulled to within 15 feet of each other. It was around noon. The sunlight penetrated deep into the canyon and the walls around us were reflecting the most striking golden color. From this point on, the Paria River was just one long never-ending golden canyon of delight.

Buckskin / Paria River Confluence

At mile 7.5, we came to the confluence of the Paria and the haunting Buckskin Gulch. Yesterday, we did a day hike to this infamous slot canyon. Due to time constrained, we could only explore the beginning section of the canyon. Here at the confluence, I would not miss the chance to see its other end.

While other members of our team resting by the entrance. Sunny, H.Y. and I entered the narrow gulch. A stream was flowing at the bottom. We literally had to walk in the water but the river was only ankle deep. The canyon floor opened up, not far from the entrance. There were several campsites located on the sandy benches high above the creek bed. The camp was surrounded by groves of cottonwoods reaching up toward the sun. Their triangular leaves fluttering in the breeze. I became very fond of this tree since last year at the bottom of Salt Creek Canyon; this tree gave our group the desperately needed shelter. (See Salt Creek Canyon Journal)



Sunny, inside the Buckskin Gulch, a slot canyon

After 30 minutes exploring this dark chamber, (See Part 3 for further detail of this slot canyon) we returned to meet the group. We still had another 3-4 miles to reach our 1st campsite.

1st Campsite - Big Spring

Starting from the confluence, a thin layer of water began to flow over the wet sand. We switched our footwear to an old tennis shoes with a pair of waterproof neoprene socks. The riverbed was a mix of rocks, pebbles and silt. QT was the only one wearing a sandal. He must have stopped at least a half dozen time to empty all the silt inside his sandal.



Along the river bed, vegetation gradually increased. Willow, cottonwood, tamarisk, reed and rush were overhanging by the stream. Tamarisk was in full bloom; its lavender flowers were simply too pretty to ignore.

Around 6:00pm, we reached the Big Spring; the first reliable drinking water source. Big Spring actually was a seep spring, where ground water broke out from the sandstone. Around the seep, typical delicate greenery of moss, fern, columbine and monkey flower formed a hanging garden. While everyone was busy searching for the camping area, H.Y. and I could not wait to taste this cold, clear and refreshing spring water. The water was so pure that we did not even need to

filter it. There was an excellent flow of water coming out from the wall, we later returned to fill all our canteens, bottles and water bags.

The official campsite was occupied by two ladies and their dog. They were very polite and asked us to camp elsewhere. ☹️ Just around the corner, a young sycamore tree provided shelter for our camp. I set my tent right under it so I could use its branches to hang my laundry. The tree shivered as I dumped my belongings around its base, a shiver of pleasure, a good omen of our trip, I predicted.



Sunny: Move Chi, this is my spot!



Washi, washi, Jim makes sure his underwear is clean!

The campsite was quite spacious, big enough for six of us. The floor was covered with soft sand and it made perfect bedding. After a long hot day hike, I could not wait to bathe in the river. There were deep pools behind some giant rocks. I changed to short and immediately dived into one of them. The water of the Paria was murky but warm. QT joined me for the dip, Jim and Sunny did their wash. Koti arranged her belongings, As H.Y, he must be PO (pass out, per QT) somewhere.



H.Y : I like PO,

After the sun went down, the temperature of the canyon dropped to a very comfortable level. Reluctant to sleep, Koti and QT stayed awake to watch stars, looking for the little and big dipper. When the air grew colder, one by one we slipped away to our tents and sleeping bags. Inside my tent, I listened to the reed grasses nearby rattled softly, the gurgle of the Paria River, the croaking of the frogs and of course, the snore of H.Y. I enjoyed the night, watching the stars tangled in the branches of the sycamore tree. Here, the world was simple and sweet, just blue sky, smooth stone, clean sand and good companies. How could I ask for more!

2nd Day - Explore Side Canyons

H.Y. PO too much during the day and he would often wake up in the middle of the night, moving around the camp and waking up everyone. At 5:30am, we all wide awoke and had no choice but to get up and out of our tent. We ate our breakfast, packed our bags and were looking forward to another exciting day. Today, we would visit the “Crack”, “Hole” and also explore a side

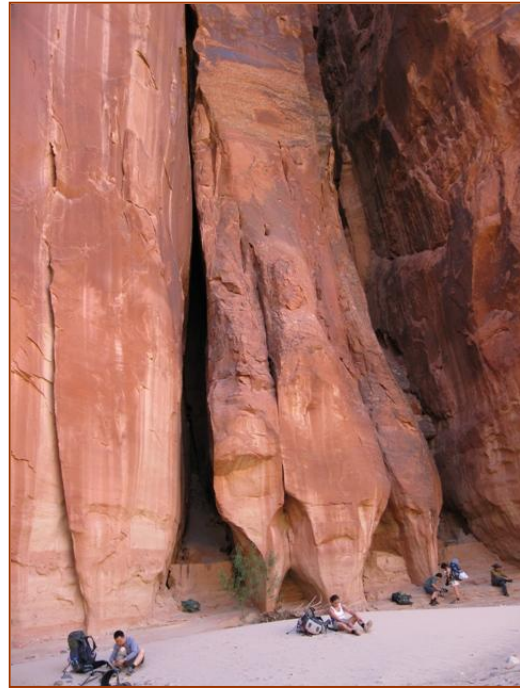


River crossing, we must have crossed the Paria River hundred times by the end of the trip

Canyon to look for an Arch.

There were many river crossings on the 2nd day. In some places, the river was more than ankle deep. Our feet were constantly wet, dried by the sun and wet again. By 10:00am, the temperature already became very hot, but the sun was momentarily blocked by a segment of the canyon wall, and the river crossing also offered temporary relief of the heat. We were a group of happy hikers.

At mile 15, we saw a big crack on the wall. This should be the 4th Crack mentioned in the guide book. There was a pool with a perfect rectangle shape at the bottom of the crack. The pool resembled the Ancient Roman Bath Tub. Jim and I each threw rocks to test how deep the pool was. It was very deep and the water was too muddy to drink. After ten minutes break, we proceeded to mile 19 where another interesting feature was located.



Resting under the 4th Crack

The Hole

The Hole was an amazing place. From the



Chi: What is in there?

outside, the place appeared to be nothing more than a slit in the canyon wall, but as we entered it, it opened up into a gigantic room. On the floor, there was a very small spring flowing out to the river. The place actually would be a good place to camp if you do not have a tent. We saw a solo hiker who had his wine bottle soaking in the spring to chill. I envied him.

The Hole was such an inviting place for our midday halt, we all PO together. Soon, H.Y. began to snore and his snore was so loud that

Sunny was afraid that he would annoyed Tom (?) the solo hiker. I had to hit H.Y. to wake him and stop his snoring. To prevent him from snoring again, I grasped H.Y to survey the Hole.

At the end of the Hole, there was a dripping spring. The walls surrounding the spring were lush of green plants. I recognized the maidenhair fern which was just lovely hanging down from the wall. By the entrance of the Hole, there were clumps of green vegetation which I did not recognize. Mistakenly, I thought it was the wild water cress. H.Y and I sampled its leaf and it tasted quite spicy.¹

¹ After I returned home, I did some research of this plant and found out the name. It is the Columbine. Thanks God, HY and I did not get sick from eating this plant.

When the temperature cooled down a bit, we prepared to leave. It took an effort of will for everyone to depart this quiet, cool place and to walk out into a glare of sunlight again. Reluctantly, we put on our packs and I found my pack was too heavy to swing over to my back, so I figured out the easy way to do it. First I propped it against a wall or set it on a rock, then I sat down and worked my arms through the padded straps, and then got up. This way, I did not have to bother H.Y. and Sunny to help me.

The Wrather Arch Canyon



*Koti: catch me if you can QT!
Koti & QT approaching the Arch*

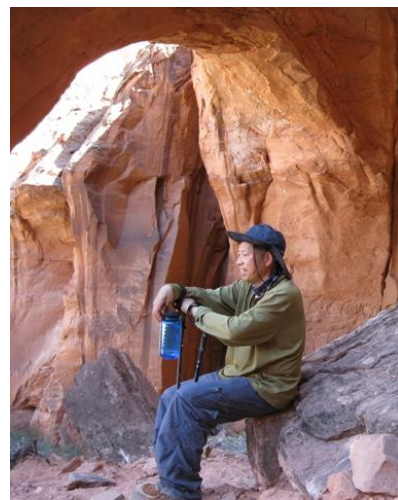
trail. The trail had a constricted gateway, but gradually it became wilder. At first, the floor covered with nothing but sand. As we climbed up to the hill, more vegetation appeared along the trail. A tiny spring flowing freely on the canyon floor, water cress, mosses, cat tails and other plants I did not recognize were abundant. This side canyon turned out to be a very nice green paradise in the middle of the desert. The climb to the Arch was very steep and took us more than an hour to locate it, but it was all worth it. Its size was impressive and the Arch was over 200 feet tall.



On our way out, H.Y. and I could not resist picking some watercress for our noodle soup dinner that night.

I purposely planned the Paria River backpacking trip for four days so we would have ample time to explore all the “must see” side canyons. Salt Creek Canyon experience was nice, but I just wish we had more time to explore. Life is too short to rush. Stop and smell the roses, I am learning as each time I planned my own trip.

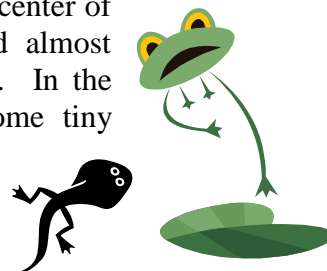
Wrather Arch Canyon was only a short distance from the Hole. However it was quite tricky to find its opening. This canyon is about 0.6 mile long but it has one of the most impressive arches in the world. I constantly checked my GPS to make sure we would not miss it. Before the trip, I marked all the view points carefully. It turned out; all my markings were quite accurate so far. I alerted QT and Koti when my GPS indicated the canyon was nearby. QT spotted a hiker-made



H.Y: Hell with the Arch, I am tired!

Shower Spring - 2nd Camp

Back on the Paria River again. Fed by the springs, the Paria River had steadily grown from a trickle. It was now a five to ten foot wide flow in the center of the canyon. In the deeper parts, we could lie down and almost submerge ourselves, quite refreshing in the heat of the day. In the shallow side pool of the river, I caught a glimpse of some tiny tadpoles, hundreds of them snorkeling along the bottom, only one-inch long. They moved so slowly that I scooped one into my palm. It wriggled a bit and then I let it go. Perhaps, someday it would transform to be a handsome prince. ☺



On our way to the 2nd camp, we passed a group of hikers who informed us that the Shower Spring was bone dried. How could that be! According to the guide book, it was supposed to be a reliable permanent spring. We were all very tired after exploring all the side canyons. Passing a sandy beach, Koti suggested we should just camp here and filter the water from the Paria River. H.Y. wanted to go further to find a better spot. He left us and returned minutes later with good news. We dragged our backpacks and followed him but when we got there, the spot was not so good after all. Koti was upset and we all just yelled at H.Y. “What kind of camp is this H.Y.?” Poor H.Y.!



Even so, the mistake had a happy ending. We gave up H.Y.’s camp and hiked further down stream. Then, another group of campers greeted us. They also politely informed us that the campsite here was full but we were welcome to share the spring. THE SPRING? “Do you mean the Shower Spring?” One of the women pointed to a hill slight off from the river. Indeed, it was. It turned out; the hikers we met previously did not really do their research well. They did not know the Shower Spring.



Shower Spring is a real gem

Shower Spring was well hidden behind some willows and reeds. We had to do some bush whacking to get there. When we arrived, what we saw was crystal clear water dripping off from a mossy ledge into a knee-deep pool. I stood beneath this drip spring and filled my water bag. When it was done, I was completely soaked by the dripping water as if I had taken a “Shower” It is definitely one of the best waterholes I ever saw. DELICIOUS!

Group Discussion

Around the corner of Shower Spring, just behind the other campers, we found a good spot to set camp. A huge canyon wall casting a nice shadow to our campsite and the air was much cooler. As soon as we set up camp, we jumped into the river to cool off. H.Y.

in stead of PO, started preparing dinner. Today, we had noodle soup with wild watercress, yummy!



QT just finished his bath and the girls were doing their washes, one happy family!

After dinner, sitting around my ground sheet, six of us enjoyed each other's company. Evenings in the canyon had a distinct quality. They were a time I cherished the most; cool air, gentle breeze, and infinite peace. But I nearly jumped out of my skin when suddenly a small toad appeared from nowhere and landed on my foot. Koti and QT

caught the tiny creature and carefully released it back to the river. The gentleness they had towards this little frog was not unnoticed.



Our conversation finally led to tomorrow's hiking plan. So far, we had achieved all our goals, with only another eighteen miles to go. Recalling Betty's warning about hiking directly under the sun, we wanted to exit the canyon



These two "sleeping beauty" have a gentle soul. I am grateful they come to my life

before noon on the 4th day. That meant, tomorrow, we had to cover at least thirteen miles. Out of the thirteen miles, five miles would be in the hot sun. QT dehydrated the most, and he often had difficulty hiking after 12:00pm. Koti suggested we should get up by 5:00am and hike as much as we could before noon. If

we were discipline enough to leave camp by 7:00am, we should be able to finish 7-8 miles in the morning. Between 1:00pm to 3:30pm, we would rest and resume the hike until 7:00pm for it would still be bright until 7:30pm. Everybody agreed and went to bed.

Desert Wind

I stretched out on top of my sleeping bag and watched the stars brightened as the sky darkened. I could not sleep but was deeply relaxed. I thought I could lay here all night and count stars. I should have known better, five minutes later, I passed out, but was

awaked by a strong wind around midnight. The wind outside my tent intensified and my whole tent bent from one side to another. Sand picked up. Since I did not have my tent cover on, the sand began to drift in my tent by the handful.



Chi: H.Y. please don't cry!

H.Y.: I have sands in my butt, in my eyes, in my ear, everywhere!

Desert Wind in the canyons is not uncommon, but I have not yet gotten used to it. The strength of the wind increased as the night fell deeper. I worried about hiking in this wind tomorrow and knew it would be miserable. Then, almost as suddenly as it began, the wind stopped before dawn. Next morning at 5:00am, Koti ran around the camp to wake up everyone. We found sands everywhere. It penetrated to every part of our luggage. Even weeks later at home, I still found sands inside my socks, pants and shirts.

our spirit. No one seemed to care much. Every day of our journey, we did not know what was coming next. We lived only day to day. We just hiked and enjoyed the day as much as possible. We totally forgot about the rest of the world. It didn't exist. All our existence was this beautiful canyon around us. For me, that was the beauty of it. Shaking off some of the sands from my pack, I looked up to the canyon wall, feeling absolutely contented.

This minor discomfort did not dampen



3rd Day - Relentless Sun

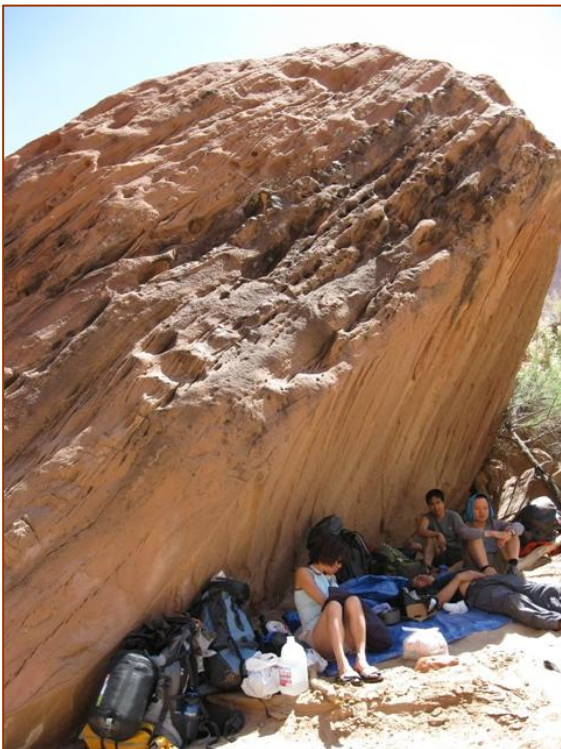
Leaving Shower Spring, the canyon widened further. At mile 25, we passed another small spring. The seep was small but was good clear water. We did not linger too long.



Onwards we hiked. At this point, our pace slowed down considerably as we came to an area of the canyon that was full of large boulders. Also, quicksand and mud made our hike increasingly problematic. One time, I sunk into a deep mud and Sunny had to come to free me.

Generally, the route through Paria Canyon was the river bed itself, however, once we passed mile 28, a trail above the riverbed gradually became visible. This "High Water Trial" was not easy to follow; most of the time, we had to go around many boulders, squeeze in between those giant rocks or climb over them to locate the trail. Sometimes, the trail was treacherous and steep. By noon, we were all depleted from the heat.

Midday Halt



The only shade we could find

“Noon is the crucial hour; the desert reveals itself nakedly and cruelly; with no meaning but its own existence.”

QT was not doing well; he was sweating like crazy and began to slow down. Heat also destroyed our appetite. All we wanted was to find a place to hide from the blazing sun. I searched for a cottonwood tree for our midday halt, but saw none. Up here above the river, the rock was hot, abrasive. There was scarcely a breeze at all. However this brutal, dry, thorny, tearing landscape was beautiful in its own way.

“When true to its own character, it is beautiful”

Somehow, this landscape in front of me reminded me what Edward Abby wrote about the desert beauty in “Desert solitaire”.

Across the river, we noticed a giant boulder slightly tilted with an angle, providing just enough shade for six of us. Everyone dropped their packs, lay down to sleep at once. I could not sleep, just sat there and dreamed about iced drink, ice cream, and home made lemonade. I walked barefoot on the sand, but retreated promptly. The sand was burning hot.

For most of the time, I discipline myself to ignore the discomfort of being hot or tired or having sore hip bones or being hungry and thirsty. I may write about them later in my journal but at the time they are simply set aside, and it is probably this ignoring of basic misery that makes me becoming a better backpacker.

By 2 o’clock, the heat was very intense; QT woke up and grumbled over the heat. He stripped nearly naked and dived into the river. HY joined him seconds later.

The hikers we met last night emerged behind the boulders. We greeted. The women seemed very strong and they were determined to finish the remaining ten miles in the hot sun. I felt their pain. By 3:30pm, the heat lingered and no one in our party wanted to move. We waited for another half hour and unenthusiastically carried on.



Jim: QT, is he dead?

Petroglyphs - Those Who Came Before

At mile 31.5 and around 5:30pm, we came to an area in which the rocks and boulders were covered by ancient Indian petroglyphs. Archeologists believe the Paria Canyon was used primarily as a travel route and for hunting, for perhaps as long as 10,000 years. The ancestral Puebloan people, or Anasazi, are thought to have used the canyon from 200 to 1200 AD, followed by the Paiute, who gave the canyon its name.

Most of the petroglyphs were animal figures, bighorn sheep, scorpion, and snake. Others had geometric patterns, dots, handprints and spacey human figures. One particular rock had half of the petroglyphs upside down. The rock must have rolled down the slope



These two were not shy to show their shortcoming



We stood in front of the "Upside Down Rock"

comings and goings, all gone....

Quarter of a mile later, beyond the sparse tall grass that grew in the sandy soil we came upon the river, now turning to gold. We decided to set camp here for the night. A welcome breeze blew across the barrel land. The wind was still very warm. After bathing in the river, we relaxed and enjoyed our final night in the desert.



Final Day - Lonely Dell Ranch & Lee's Ferry

This morning, I found myself feeling reluctant to leave the campsite. I wondered: would I ever come back here, to this place, sleep on this particular spot? Only twenty people are allowed daily to visit this special place; I feel privilege and humble to be here, and I am sure, my five companions feel the same way. Soon, we passed the historical Wilson Ranch and crossed the park boundary. Koti, on behalf of our group, signed off on the register. Once we reached Lonely Dell Ranch parking lot, our four days, three nights backpacking adventure came to an end.



YES, WE DID IT!!! 😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊

Everyone in this trip made his/her valuable contributions; no one in the group was the key player or leader. We each shared our responsibilities. When time came to lead or to take over the situation, the right person showed up and the rest followed. I am very grateful to have these five individuals in my trip. Thank you all!

The Place No One Knew

I have come to know this mystical river canyon as a result of my research of the Glen Canyon Dam. Glen Canyon is still beautiful today, but I often wonder just how mysterious and astonishing beautiful could Glen Canyon have been before Lake Powell.

“The Canyonlands did have a heart, a living heart, and that heart was Glen Canyon and the golden, flowing Colorado River”

Edward Abbey



HY: Koti dear, my name is HY, not PO.

The Colorado River will be flowing freely again; I hope this day will come; it has to come.....

PART 1 - THE END