

# Final Chapter - "The Place No One Knew"



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[Tiffanymc.blogspot.com](http://Tiffanymc.blogspot.com)



## Preliminary Remarks

More than ten years ago when I first joined CMCNY, I was only a callow hiker; with a pair of sneakers, jeans, and a T-shirt, did not know what nature was all about and hiked only for pleasure. A lot of things have happened during those years with CMCNY, some, I choose not to remember, but some I value them deeply. On the eve of my departure, few individuals I have to mention and thank them for their friendship: Gin, Mr. Chen & George.

Knowing Gin, Mr. Chen and George Li and subsequently hiking and training with them for the 26-mile hike was one of those precious moments that I will forever remember. Three of them have an enormous impact on my life and they are to some extent responsible for what I am today. Not



only they are my friends, but also they are my mentors, my teachers and my idols. I learned from Mr. Chen about life time commitment, from George, I found out the difference between courage and audacity, and from Gin; I discovered that gentleness in a male does not necessarily make him less of a man. This three-part series “**The Place No One Knew**” is my dedication to these three remarkable athletes and leaders, I salute them.



Since the first publish of part 1 – Paria River Canyon in CMCNY website, I have received many supporting e-mails and encouraging comments from friends and strangers. I thank you very much for all your supports. The three-part series of “**The Place No One Knew**” is the product of six people: HY Lee, Sunny Chen, Koti Chen, Jim Wang and Quang Tran. Without their contributions, I could not have been able to put the entire story together.

Here is the final chapter, Part 2 – Rainbow Bridge, the Real Way. Enjoy.

### **Final note:**

If you are interested in finding out my life with Peace Corps in Azerbaijan for the next 27 months, please visit my blog at: <http://tiffanymc.blogspot>.



## Part 2 - Rainbow Bridge - the Real Way



Rainbow Bridge, the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest natural arch in the world <sup>1</sup> once was hidden deep inside the Navajo Mountain. This national monument, deemed as one of the great wonders of the world, has tremendous religious value to the Navajo Nation. The Arch is considered sacred and is an important prayer spot for the Navajos. Due to its isolation, prior to the construction of the Glen Canyon Dam, it was never an easy journey to visit this sacred site.

*Those who see it then will not understand that half the beauty of Rainbow Bridge lay in its remoteness, its relative difficulty of access, and in the wilderness surrounding it, of which it was an integral part. When these aspects are removed the bridge will be no more than an isolated geological oddity..."*

*Edward Abbey*



For this very reason, I rejected the idea of seeing Rainbow Bridge via Lake Powell. I wanted very much paying my respect to this sacred site, just like the native Navajos, **ON FOOT**. On May 22, 2009, six of us: QT, Koti, HY, Sunny, Jim and I, descended to the Cha Canyon, little did we know how strenuous this hike would be.

<sup>1</sup> The world largest natural arch is located in Kashgar, Xingjian China. The arch was rediscovered by the National Geographic Team in 2000. The arch was first visited by a westerner Eric Shipton and his wife Diana in 1947. Detail account of their discovery was documented by their books: Mountain of Tartary by Eric Shipton and The Antique Land by Diana Shipton.

## Barohoini Nonnezoshe - Rainbow Arch



*He stood a moment, dumb with surprise-turning-to-reverence, then straightway built an altar whose rising smoke column carried his prayer of homage up into the turquoise dome where dwells the omniscient SkyFather.*

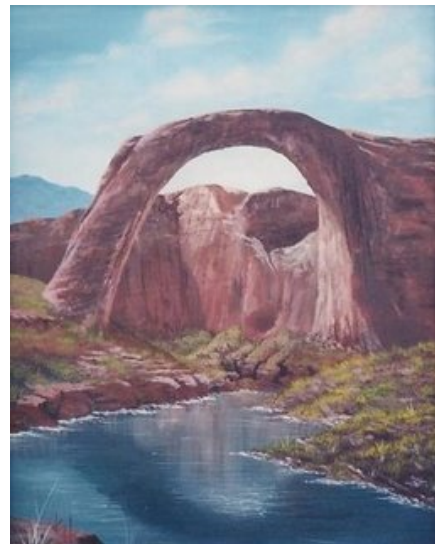
Neil Merton Judd



### Ancient story about Rainbow Bridge:

*“Long, long ago, one of Navajo hero gods, hunting in the canyon, was suddenly entrapped by a rush of flood waters. In this predicament, with escape cut off, death for the hunter seemed unavoidable. But just then the great Sky Father cast a rainbow before the torrent, the hero god climbed to safety across the arch, the latter turned to stone and has so remained until this very day as proof to all of the omnipotence of our Sky Father and His constant watchfulness over His earth children.”*

No one knows who first discovered the Rainbow Bridge. Most suggested that it was probably some Indians, way back in the pre-Columbian period, romped and roamed widely over this continent and accidentally stumbled on this arch. They left neither drawing nor written record to prove their discovery. However, both the Navajo and Piute peoples knew the bridge long before the white men discovered it in 1909. They gave it a native name. The Piute called it Barohoini – the Rainbow. The Navajo described it as Nonnezoshe – the Arch.



*Barohoini Nonnezoshe – the native name*

### Another Challenge

Again, during my research of Glen Canyon Dam, I was fascinated by this remote and mysterious wonder. Today, thousands of visitors each year view this arch via an easy access – by boat. Only a handful of hikers and backpackers are willing to endure the rigorous overland trip to visit this place. I knew before hand this was not going to be an easy trek for six of us. Even with today’s ultra light backpack, tent and sleeping bag, freeze dried food, and sturdy footwear, the 28 miles backcountry trail to Rainbow Bridge is an arduous journey. Nevertheless, my hopelessly romantic and adventurous mind persuaded me to go for it. The night before the trek, I told everyone to pack light, bring only the absolutely necessary items. Even so, none of us mentally prepared for the unexpected hardship.

## Finding a Shuttle

Rainbow Bridge can be accessed by two beautiful backpacking trails (North and South Trails). Our plan is to begin our trek on the South Trail and exit on the North side of the Navajo Mountain. Both trailheads can only be reached via unpaved roads on the Navajo Indian Reservation. Jim is uneasy about driving on the dirt road, especially after a storm. The weather forecast shows 40% chance of rain. I naively ignore the weather warning for the rain in May, in the desert, is very rare. However, I am concerned about the vandalism, an incident happened a few years ago at the North Trail parking lot. To ease our concern, we all agree to look for a shuttle service around Rainbow City.



*Tonya, Kevin and their family members*

We arrive at Rainbow City and have found the local is quite friendly. They agree to give us a lift. Tonya, our shuttle car driver informs us that due to the recent rain, most of the trails on the South side have been washed off. It will be difficult to follow the path.



## Change of Plan

This is a bad news. We have been planning to do a semi-loop hike: going down 13 miles to Bridge Canyon from the south side, and climbing back up 15 miles to Cha Canyon to reach the North Trail parking lot. If everything goes well as planned, we should come out from the canyon by noon on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. Now, if South Trail access is impossible, we have no choice but giving up our ambitious 3 days backpacking plan. We come up with a new plan within minutes: Day 1, we will set camp at mile 10 inside Oak Canyon. Day 2, do a 10 miles round trip day hike to Rainbow Bridge, return to camp, pack and hike back 4 miles to set camp at Bald Rock Canyon. This will make the 3<sup>rd</sup> day an easy 6 miles hike with our packs. We all agree.

Leaving one car at Tonya's house, six of us cram in another car and follow Kevin to the trailhead. Kevin is Tonya's neighbor and his kids also join us for the ride. The kids seem having lots of fun. Every time when Kevin makes a dangerous turn, they laugh and cheer at the back of the truck. Remember what Kevin told us back at Rainbow City, they (the native Indian) do not require much to live on. Food, water and the mountain air are all they need. His words make me ponder, are people in developed cultures really happier?

## Navajo Mountain

The road to the trailhead is very dusty, rough and has many curves. Forty-five minutes later, we arrive at our destination. We get out of our car and immediately are in awe of the size of the mountain. Navajo Mountain rises in solitary majesty, 10,000 feet above sea level. Here at the parking lot, the elevation is about 6,000 feet. Standing on the edge of the cliff and looking down to the valley below us, we can see the intricate network of canyons extended all



the way to the horizon. There are many isolated rock domes and pinnacles, with white, yellow, orange and tan. The Valley is walled in by towering cliffs, and the cliffs have the most striking colors of vermilion and umber. A gust of wind blows across the plateau whipping up dusts of cloud. I stand entranced at the sight, feeling humble but yet uneasy for what lies ahead.

“Behind this mountain top, a trail will lead to a gate, close the gate behind you. You will find water around there.” Kevin gives us his last minute instruction and off we go. Six of us slowly descend to the 1<sup>st</sup> canyon: Cha Canyon. Here in the mountain, the air is dry but cool and fresh. The sky is covered with clouds, mollified the sun and we are happy hiking with such a cool temperature.

## Cha Canyon

The first thing I notice about the North trail is: it is not always down hill. It turns and twists but always goes up and up. As soon as we drop down a few hundred feet, the trail climbs back up again. This makes the hike very tiring. It takes us more than an hour to reach the gate. The gate marks the real beginning of the North Trail.



*Jim: Gateway to Hell*

Between Cha Canyon and Bald Rock Canyon, the trail becomes narrow. Cha Canyon is famous for its beautiful waterfalls and petroglyphs. Unfortunately, it is the end of the dry season; only dried river bed and dried wash are along the bench land. Animal droppings are plentiful, scattered our trail. Soon,

another steep climb begins, and we find ourselves out of breath. At the end of the climb, we reach a flat mountain top with a phenomenal view. We drop our packs and decide to take a break here.



The area is covered with junipers, sagebrush and various cacti. The cacti are in full bloom with variety of colors, yellow, pink, red and purple. Enjoying the view in front of us, we eat our lunch: hard boiled egg and peanut butter sandwich. By now, I am pretty sick of peanut butter sandwich. Tossing the sandwich back to my pack, I walk over to the ridge and take some pictures of the cacti. HY finds a beautiful spot, right underneath a young juniper tree and PO.

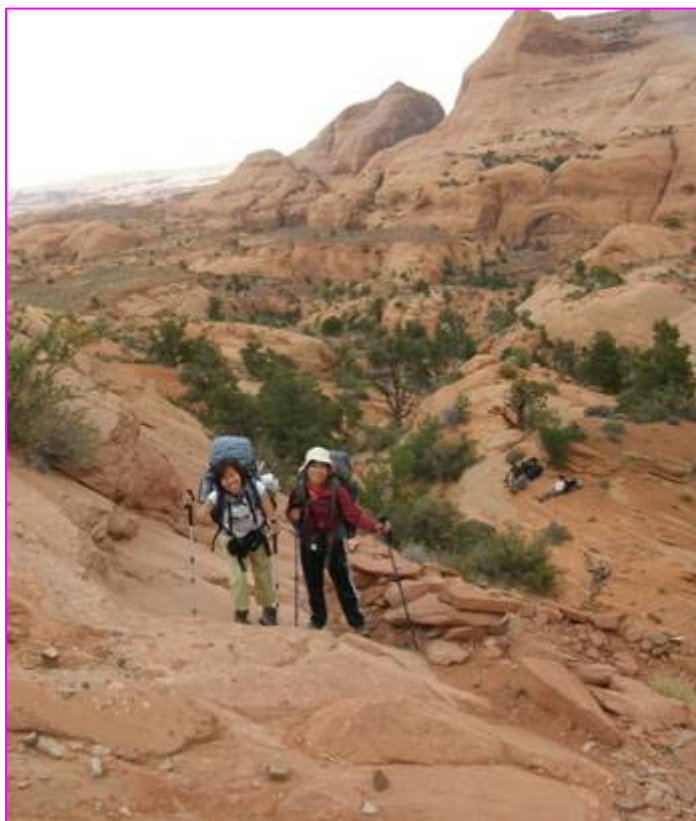
### Ragged Canyons

Being a nature lover, I find the inclination to enjoy my surroundings. Solitude is to be found here, ragged canyons thread downward and away; vast plateau of red peaks and yellow mesas encircle the entire area. The wild beauty of these untamed canyons, I sense it, is not for everyone. Somehow, the landscape is not as delightful and welcoming as that of the Paria River. In spite of all my research of this canyon, the land gives me an eerie and peculiar feeling as if I have not yet prepared myself for this place.

#### A "Spirit" dominates this mountain!

My intuition hits me and I finally understand my feeling.

After lunch, we carry on. The trail we follow so far is very good. Our hiking pattern continues, wandering through a number of small canyons, with strenuous ups and downs. After a few miles we drop down into Bald Rock Canyon, where a nice stream flows in thin sheets over smooth rock ("slick rock"). There is a beautiful camp site just before the brook. This must be the water source that Kevin referred to. A big fire ring gives hint that this is a popular stopping place. The camp is carpeted with soft white sand. I wish we could camp here. Right across



*Sunny: are we there yet Chi?*

the creek, it is another steep climb. For twenty minutes, the trail leads us to a big mountain dome with bare sheet-rock, then, a narrow passage shows the way to another

unknown canyon. Now, we are no longer seeing the canyon walls around us as things of indescribable beauty but only as obstacles to our progress. The day already brings us fatigue. I check on QT and cannot help but noticing that he is trembling. I hope he will make it. At length we turn into another long canyon with straight rugged tall red walls. At the end of a sandy floor, there is another perceptible ascent. The climb appears endless. Far ahead, some dark clouds are drafting towards our direction.

### Pre-historical Dwelling

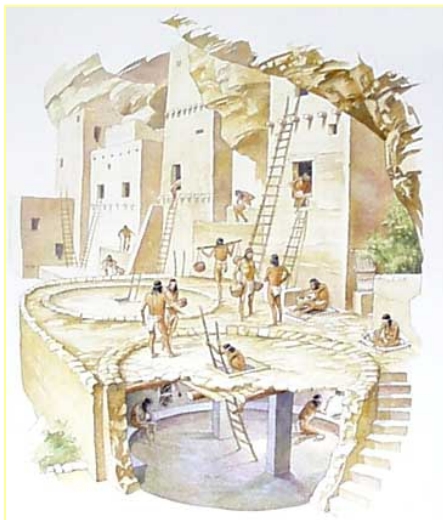
Scrambling to the sandy hill, I look up and see a cave on the right wall. This is the wonder of the desert, always something unforeseeable, waiting around the next turn in the canyon wall. Here it is! a pre-historical cave dwelling.

This ought to be the “Big Cave” mentioned in the guide book. The cliff is soaring high but there are no visible Moki steps<sup>2</sup> or pecked steps on the wall to give access to the cave. From my readings, I understand most Anasazi dwellings usually face east to receive a morning sun. This one is no exception.



*Big Cave: ancient cliff dwelling*

The cave is very large, providing enough shelter for an entire family. I visualize the Anasazi who once occupied this cave, their cooking fire burning high, flicking shadows on the wall laughing and dancing inside this grotto, and the smoke curled gently up and out into the night. Up there must be quiet and warm. With the protection from rain, and a nearby creek for water, combining the purring of the wind, the coolness of the rocks, and the beauty of the day, all the basic living necessities are here. It ought to be a nice place to sleep, to play and to dream.



This cave holds memory of ancient voices, mystery with so many answer that we will never be able to know. I am absolutely mesmerized by its secreted past.

<sup>2</sup> Moki step: prehistoric steps created by ancient native Indians. The steps often were found on the cliff wall where the cliff dwellings were located.



## Lost in Bald Rock Canyon

Leaving the cave, our path now perches on the edge of a big red wall. The steepness of



the drop-off literally causes us to get dizzy when looking down. The hill is crisscrossed with many small animal trails. The main trail becomes less and less apparent. As we go down into the canyon floor, we notice some of the bedrock is notched out like stairs. This is done by the native so the pack mules and horses will not slip and fall on the slick rock. By mistake, Sunny and I begin to follow the animal

droppings and drift off from the main trail.

Among the group, HY always has a better sense of direction. He often alerts Sunny and I when we accidentally go astray. This time, for whatever reason, he didn't insist on correcting us. Apparently, somewhere before reaching the bottom of the canyon floor, the main trail turns to east and upward. HY, although notices a pile of cairns at the tuning point, fails to correct Sunny and I. When we discover the error, we are already  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile away from the main trail. Here, everyone becomes frustrated. We take off our packs and split into two groups. Koti and Jim go back up to the



*Here is where we began to stray from the main trail*

hill, HY and I go down further and continue to follow the animal droppings. Sunny and QT wait in the middle so if either group



finds the trail, they will call out to us. HY and I spot a trail with heavy sand and lots of animal dung scattering on the floor. Some of them are still very fresh. Hundred feet down, abruptly, the trail ends. About 8-10 feet above the sandy floor, there is a little ramp of rocks and logs piling up, with a noticeable packed steps in the rock, in a zigzag pattern, leading up to the top. We also find two cairns along the trail but our instinct tells us, this is not a foot trail, perhaps an animal path. HY and I turn back and sit with

Sunny in the shade of a small juniper, waiting for Koti and Jim's return. "We found the trail!" Jim appears down below us. Without much loss of time; we find the main trail. An hour later, we descent to a steep and rugged canyon, named by Zane Grey in 1913, "A Surprise Valley"

### Surprise Valley & Nasja Creek

Surprise Valley is really full of surprises. First it is the profuse vegetation.

Desert flowers with delicate white, pale yellow, bright orange and purple cover the entire valley. Indian paintbrush is in its scarlet hue, cactus grows in varied size, color, and fantastic shape. Juniper

and cedar grow exceptionally tall here. Afar from my belief, I find a monkey scarlet flower nesting at the foot of a cliff wall. This plant usually grows on a canyon wall with a seep spring. It is a clear indication that this place is not as dry as it appears.



*Surprise Valley: the long, winding valley is carpeted with emerald green*



*Entrance to the surprise valley*

Climbing further down to the valley, at the bottom, we cross another stream with a good amount of flowing water. This must be the Nasja creek, or the Owl creek. Just above the creek, the 2<sup>nd</sup> surprise! A beautiful campsite with picnic table is waiting for us. I check my GPS, so far, we only did 6.5 miles. This place would have been a

lovely

place to camp for the night. Unfortunately, this is not our planned sleeping area, but we can not resist taking a short break here.

### Lovely Encounter

All of a sudden, we are startled by a loud "moo" sound. We look around and cannot locate the noise. Then the calling comes back again. It is behind the picnic table and among the thick bushes. We



look at that direction and spot a cow, a lovely cow staring back at us. This cow must be one of the cattle that belong to the native Indian. The cow is not moving and it keeps calling us. Sunny and I pretend to be a cow and make the “moo” sound. Again, the cow calls back. Back and forth, back and forth, finally, I walk closer to the cow and he runs away. We conclude, the cow must be so lonely here and it is happy to see us. “*Salaam alaykum*” Cow, go and peace be upon you. I just remember how the desert people greet each other. ☺ It is a happy encounter!



*Hey, I am cute,  
don't eat me*

## The Owl Bridge

We still have another 3.5 mile to go. We should not linger here too



*Come on, you can smile better than this!*

long. The day is already close to the end. Not far from the campsite, Koti and QT catch a glimpse of an Arch. They alert us. I am surprised to see it since I did not expect the Arch is right next to the trail. This is the Owl Bridge I read from the guide book, a very attractive natural bridge. After a few picture taken, we plod on again. More hours have passed, our toil increases, and we are looking forward to reaching our camp.

Finally, we reach a ridge with a big drop. Down below, a broken rocky trail zigzags its way to a narrow ravine. We cannot see the bottom for the gully is very deep. With much effort, we slip and stumble along over those loose and treacherous stones, some large, some small. Half way through, I check my GPS again. It reveals a creek right underneath us. It is to be our camp for the night. I confirm to everyone. What a relief!

## Oak Canyon

We limp and lag, dragging ourselves to the bottom. A little stream trickles forwards at the bed of the ravine. The name of the stream is Oak Creek and we are entering to the Oak Canyon. “*Water is available, but poor campsite*”. This is what the guide book describes and indeed it is. We cross the brook, climb up to a bench land and find a tall young cottonwood. The campsite is so small that we can hardly find a place to set our tents. Koti, QT and Jim occupy the small strip of ground very close to the river bed. Sunny and her gigantic tent force me to erect my tent on an uneven floor. HY has no idea where to put up his tent yet. With his easy attitude, he can sleep anywhere he wants. The daylight is fading and we quickly cook a simple meal.

## Rain Storm & Sweet Memory

Darkness overtakes us by the time we finish our dishes. Then, it starts a light rain. From the narrow slot of sky between the canyon walls, I can see the black storm cloud looming above our camp, but I do not pay much attention to it since rain storm in the desert usually goes as quickly as it comes. I put a tent cover on, collect some laundries, put away the stove and other cooking utensils, and then retire to my tent. Outside, I can hear HY singing cheerfully while he is setting up his tent in the rain. Sunny, Koti,



*Oak Canyon*

QT and Jim are already inside their tents. We have been tired for a long time, so sleep comes easily.

Cocooning inside my 1-person Marmot tent, I am actually enjoying the rain. Rain at night always brings back sweet memory of my childhood in Hong Kong. Summer time, when it rained at night, the temperature would get much cooler and my grandmother would climb up to our bed, put a blanket over my sister and me. The image of her aging figure, struggling in the dark with much effort always brought tears to my eyes. When my grandmother died, I had a hard time to deal with it, so I wrote a poem to remember her.<sup>3</sup> Tonight, I think of her again, silently I say a few prayers..... not long, I drift off to sleep with a sweet and warm feeling.



As the night wears on, the storm intensifies. Sometime around midnight, the heaven bursts, and the downpour begins. Remembering what QT said about the balanced rock up on the hill beside our camp, I cannot help but thinking if it falls, we will all go to heaven tonight.



<sup>3</sup> See last page appendix if you are interested reading the poem.

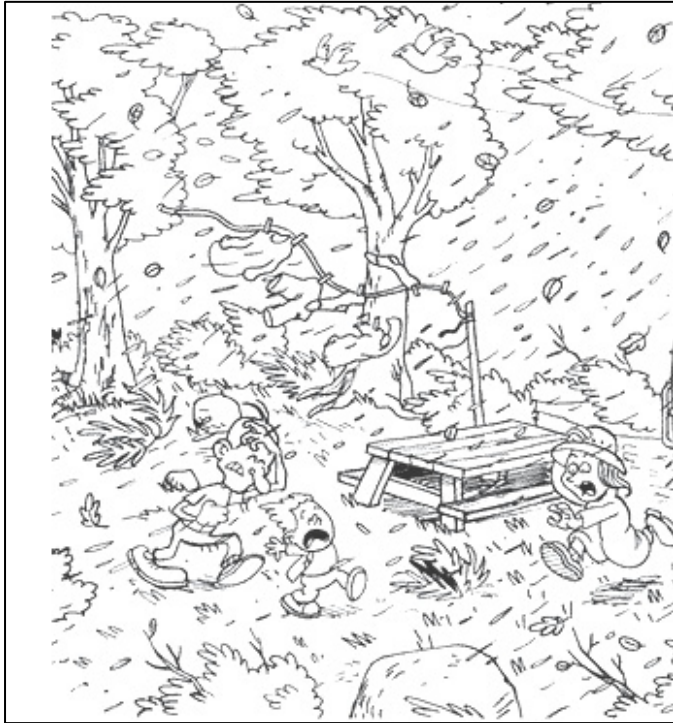
## Panic

The storm lasts through the night. The sky is still dark in the morning. None of us get up yet, just waiting out the storm inside our tents. An hour has passed, rain continues.

***“Let us get the hell out of here!”***

Jim is screaming loudly inside his tent. For whatever reason, he seems very agitated by the storm. Our original plan is to have another night here in the camp, if we decide to leave now, our trip is cut short and we are all going home today! Is this what we all want?

Without even discussing the plan with HY and me, three of them, QT, Koti and Jim get up and begin to pack in the rain. I am annoyed by their disrespectful manner, and most importantly their rush decision without thinking the matter through. I ignore their action, HY, Sunny and I continue to wait for the storm to pass. Around ten, the rain dies down a little bit, HY and I get out of our tent. What we see around the camp is quite disturbing.



*Jim, QT & Koti: Get me out of here!*

## Rain Storm and Flood in the Desert

The ground is completely saturated with rainwater. Mud is everywhere. Both HY and my tents are slightly sinks into the sand since they are erected on a slope. Sunny is complaining about the leak inside her tent. All our camping equipments are in disarray, and everything is soaking wet. Packing is out of the question! Few minutes later, heavy rain returns, the sky grows somber. HY and I retreat to his tent and discuss our options.



My first concern is: If we pack now and go, all of our camping equipments will be much heavier. What about our drinking water? Last night, we used up all the water for cooking. With only Koti’s water filter working properly; it will take us at least an hour to have the water available for everyone. None of us have breakfast yet and we need to eat to have the energy to climb out of the canyon. Another concern is safety, are we ready to get out there and face the danger. Do we all have a proper rain gear? How do

we find rescue if one of us falls off the cliff? Since leaving the trailhead yesterday, we have not yet met another hiker. This is one of the most remote areas in the Arizona desert. The warning message from the National Park clearly indicates the danger we will be facing:

*Portions of both (North and South) trails are subject to flash flooding during thunderstorms. Neither trail is maintained. Be prepared! Search, rescue and evacuation can be time-consuming and expensive. Neither the National Park Service nor the Navajo Nation is responsible for search and rescue operations....*

I look at HY and wait for his opinion. Suddenly, we hear a loud rumbling noise outside our tent. The sound is like a freight train rolling full speed down toward us. HY and I get out, and what we see is shocking. The little stream we crossed yesterday has grown to be a turbulent waterway. The used to be clear water turns into a thick, brownish liquid, like chocolate milk. Although we are on the safety of a higher ground, we can feel the flood roared past below, it trembles. Crossing the river is out of the question; our only choice is to wait for the river to subside.

### The Three Soaking Ducklings

The rain continues to fall, and three of them (Koti, QT and Jim) with their tent packing inside their bag are standing in the rain. They cannot leave and yet they have no place to shelter from the rain. QT does not even have a rain coat on. I am very frustrated with them and just leave them there. Later, Sunny is kind enough to invite them to her tent.



*These three gave me and HY lots of grief that morning*



*QT: Oops, I don't have a raincoat Chi and I am pretty wet! Any suggestion?*

*Koti: Jeez, Chi, what is the story of the rain?*



*Jim: "F" the rain!*

## Remarkable Landscape

After a prolonged rain, the sky finally turns a little brighter. We seize the opportunity and pack our belongings. By noon, the rain ceases, and the river drops to a level that we can cross. I see QT shiver with only a thin T-shirt and a soaking wet jacket. My frustration with him was already forgotten, so I pull out my "Mountain Hardware" sweatshirt to keep him warm. As soon as we are all ready to go, we cross the river and work up to that steep hill. On we go, under the drizzling rain, we at last climb out of the Oak Canyon and enter into the Surprise Valley again.



Rain has transformed the desert. The landscape changes noticeably the moment we enter into the Surprise Valley. The previously dried river bed and overhangs, now turn into pools and waterfalls. Mud is everywhere and clings to our boots. The air is moist. All



*Rain transforms the entire desert*

the plants are dressed in an emerald color. The nodding and bowing of the desert flowers seem cheering the occasion. The leaves of the junipers shift gently as raindrops hit in sequence. A breeze stirs the branches and the aroma of the juniper swirls out of every leaf. I inhale that marvelous scent that graces the air, not cloying, but fresh and clean. It is what the world ought to smell like when it rains.

I just love everything about the desert, the cloudless sky, the silence, the vast emptiness, the dryness, the air, the freedom, the danger and now the rain. I may even have already reached the point where I can live with the intensive heat of the desert.

Desert for some people looks hostile, but only from a distance. Close up, it is in its way, beautiful.

Soon, the torrential rain resumes, and we crawl under a juniper trying desperately to take shelter from the rain. HY uses his poncho to shield us from the downpour, but in spite of his kindness, I can still feel the rain drizzling down my neck, dripping from my forehead into eyebrows and from there down around the corners of my eyes and along the nose. WET, WET and WET!



*HY, sitting underneath a juniper*

## Indian Hogan - Tee Pee

When the rain lessens, we shoulder our pack which has become much heavier after absorbing all the rain water. My shoulder begins to feel the weight, dragging me down each time I climb up a hill. Passing the Owl Bridge again, Koti spots an old abandoned Indian Hogan, a T-pee which we did not notice before.



T-pee is a Navajo Indian round house constructed of forked sticks or branches, and covered with packed earth, hides, or grass. Like all the Indian dwellings, the T-pee is built with the entrance facing east to catch the first light of the morning sun. It is a sacred home for the Navajo people who practice traditional religion. Every family, even if they live most of the time in a newer home, must have this traditional Hogan for ceremonies, and to keep themselves in balance, in good luck and in happiness.

The T-pee seems very old, but it is still in one piece, with the shape of a perfect dome. The one-room living quarter, although is primitive, is nonetheless withstanding the test of time.



## Our Endurance

The rain clouds continue clinging to the Navajo Mountain, covering up the high mesas, and all far distances vanished in the mist. The valley below is suspended mysteriously between an unseen earth and an invisible sky. Sometimes we are lashed with rain, heavy rain. Now and then, we wobble and slither. I have to admit, even without the rain, this hike is considered strenuous. Six of us, Sunny, Jim, HY and I are the 26-mile hikers, Koti is a marathon runner, only QT lacks of physical training. QT is the youngest among us, and he is holding up pretty good so far, I am proud of him. In fact, I am proud of the team. Only two days ago, we ended our four days Paria River Canyon hike, covering 40 miles with our heavy pack. Today, we are confronting an even tougher challenge, suffering from the severe weather, climbing up and down this labyrinth canyon. Our endurance and true character are being tested as each step we take.

*QT: Oh Chi, please don't push me, my knee hurts!*



## The Native Indian & Their Pilgrimage

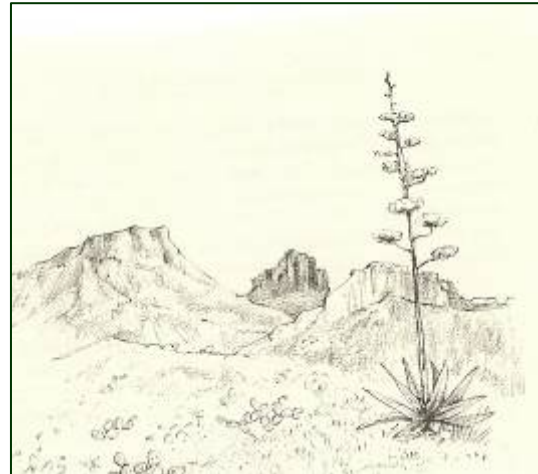
On our way to the Bald Rock Canyon, we run into two hikers for the first time. With the falling rain, we did not anticipate meeting another fellow hiker, especially coming all the way down to see the Rainbow Bridge. We can not wait telling them how miserable it was for us. The elder lady does not seem too concerned with the rain, she is not backing out pulling her hat tighter over her head and off she goes.



As we are getting closer to the end, we meet more and more hikers, approximately forty of them. One is an eighty year old grandmother with her 6 or 7 years old granddaughter. The little girl is unable to carry a backpack, so her uncle is carrying it for her. Almost all of them we meet are Native American. I am quite surprised to see the heavy traffic on this trail, not

because of the bad weather but because of the remoteness of this area. We were told, each year only a handful of hikers would come here; we would be lucky if we run into any one at all.

On the last campsite, we encounter a small group of Native Indians, having a big camp fire burning. I am impressed that they are able to build such a handsome fire in the midst of the rain. I approach one of them and ask him the question. He shyly points out the yucca plant and explains to me that its leaves are very good to start a fire. HY is having a conversation with one of the Natives and his appearance is the most striking. He reminds me of the indigenous Pemon Indian I met few years ago in the Venezuela jungle. He is tall and strong. His eyes bloodshot and his face like the roughened oak from the pitiless sun and wind of the desert. He holds all the characteristic of a noble, spiritual, somber and knowledgeable Indian Chief. Our conversation with him leads us to understand that they are all from the same group and they are all Pilgrims paying homage to the Rainbow Bridge.



*Yucca Plant*



Nonnezoshe (Rainbow Bridge) has life, wild life. For millions of years, it has hidden inside the Navajo Mountain, protecting its children, and here stands in front of HY and me, one of its finest: a dark and silent descendant. Would it be a great adventure to accompany him and visit the Bridge two years from now? It will be my first agenda when I return from Azerbaijan.

### Another “Place No One Knew”

My backpack has never been so heavy; I shift and tighten my pack, trying every possible way making my shoulder more comfortable. HY sees my struggle and kindly takes the garbage bag off my pack and ties it to his. The Angel man comes to the rescue again! Finally, the last hill, we climb out of the valley and reach the parking lot. After unload



*The hike is not easy*

our packs, we all collapse and swear never wanted to touch our packs again for the next few days.

The rain has stopped shortly after we reach the parking lot. The late afternoon sun filters through the clouds and brings out the best color of the Navajo Mountain. I look back at the sunlit peaks and feel the spirit living inside this canyon. I do not feel bad not reaching the Rainbow Bridge. Actually it gives me an excuse to return

here. Next time, I will devote more time to get acquainted with this

secretive valley. I am looking forward to this day.

Our misery finally is over, but it is still there in our hearts and souls. Giving time, this physical pain, the hike, the hills, the rain and the disagreement will turn into sweet memories. They will grow larger, sweeter, and lovelier in the days and years to come. I will treasure them, as it will be part of my past, like all my other journeys.



As our vehicle heads toward the setting sun, I look down to the valley once more, far below, the desert glows.

**PART 2 - THE END**

## Appendix

### Rain 祖母

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I often dreamed about my childhood time when,  
the summer rain came late at night unexpected  
Together with the lightning, thunder and wind,  
Mixing with the sizzling sound of the bamboo leaves,  
Awaking me, comforting me, and revealing me the secret of the night...

The storm brought in drops of rain,  
Hitting the ceiling, splashing my window  
Torturing the delicate white jasmine, and eventually  
Snuck into my bed....

Curling up my body under a thin cover,  
Unwilling to wake up from a already forgotten dream  
Suddenly, a warm layer of blanket  
Covering my shoulder,  
Warming up my body and soul....

Fumbling in the dark, her aging figure  
Fading away from my dream....  
Outside my window  
The bamboo leaves still complaining about  
The insensitive wind, howling and howling....

END