

RESUME OF GRAND CANYON HIKE
First Major Hike of KACTUS KICKERS - APS Hiking Club

May 30, 31, June 1, 1969

There were 44 members (employees, spouses and children) and two guests of the A.P.S. Hiking Club who left the top of the rim of the Grand Canyon on Friday, May 30, 1969, at approximately 7:30 a.m. to hike down the Kaibab Trail to the Colorado River and the Phantom Ranch Campground - a walking distance of 7.3 miles. (Two additional members, Ron Palmer and his son, Bobby, left on Saturday morning and met us at Indian Gardens Campground that evening).

All of the members completed the entire hike of 17 miles or more, except for three, who required the services of a Helicopter to take them to the top. Cecil Armstrong, Jr. had aggravated an old knee injury on the downhill trail and it became quite painful. Gordon Hoopman's son, Adam, developed stomach pains which might have been an attack of appendicitis. Susan Armstrong was having trouble with her asthma. This Helicopter airlift occurred at Phantom Ranch early on Saturday morning, and the 'patients' were taken to Grand Canyon Village Hospital.

After walking about 5 to 6 hours on a long, hot and dusty trail with spectacular views, (where no water was available to refill our canteens), we were very happy to cool off our hot and tired feet in the Bright Angel Creek at Phantom Ranch Campground. We exchanged hot water in our canteens for cool water - seemed like we couldn't get enough fresh water to drink - we were sort of dehydrated

It was very hot and windy at the Campground. Some of our group had a first-time experience trying to cook dehydrated foods on small stoves in a 40-mile an hour wind. To partially compensate for blowing dust, we were evaporative cooled by spray blown 70 feet from the stream:

Note: On Saturday, after we arrived at Indian Gardens, the Park Ranger informed us that the temperature the day before at Phantom Ranch was 108 degrees and that it cooled down to 85 degrees at night.

The member's children (and some adults, too) enjoyed wading and floating on air mattresses in Bright Angel Creek. A few brave members took a dip in a shallow spot along the Colorado River where it was so cold that swimmers could stay in only a few minutes at a time:

John Havey will always remember Bright Angel Creek as the place where the wind blew his straw hat off (with his Hiking Club Name Tag on it) and sent it floating down the Creek on into the Colorado River, and perhaps, the Gulf of California. Quien sabe? Another hat spiraled up 100 feet to land on a ledge.

Five members of our Club hiked extra mileage to enjoy a decent meal at the Dining Hall of Phantom Ranch. The dinner gong rang at 6 p.m. sharp and we all sat down to a family style dinner of: Roast Prime Rib, Baked Potato, Peas, Corn, Carrot Jell-O Salad, Homemade Baking Powder Biscuits (with gobs of butter), all the Iced Tea and Coffee we could drink. And for dessert, a large piece of Homemade Chocolate Fudge Nut Cake'. This great meal was worth the money (\$5.00) and worth waiting for, as we had to have reservations two months in advance.

Since it was such a warm evening, most of us rested on ground cloths or space blankets; sleeping bags were not really needed. It was difficult to sleep in the heat with the wind blowing, so the Buell's, Wagner's and Moore's decided to leave the bottom of the Canyon at midnight to hike half way out to Indian Gardens, where it was supposed to be cooler. A full moon helped guide them on the trail and added a new dimension to the Canyon's beauty.

The remainder of the group left at daybreak, hiked along the Colorado River Trail for 1.5 miles to the Bright Angel Trail, and then up to Indian Gardens Campground; a total distance of 5.3 miles. The Grand Canyon was very beautiful in the early morning hours, and the sunrise was lovely to behold:

We met many interesting people along the trail and at Indian Gardens. We particularly remember meeting a 16-year-old girl who was carrying her pet Iguana, named Po-Po, from South America. She told us she couldn't arrange for anyone to care for him at home, so she brought him along with her and her two girl friends on their hike in the Grand Canyon.

At Indian Gardens, we met a Franciscan Catholic Nun. Ken Welsh asked her if she really was a Nun, and what was she doing there. Her reply was: "Yes, I think I was a Nun when I left, but I'm not sure now: I wanted to get some fresh air.

We met a group of Scouts from Lithuania who carried tea in their canteens. Our official First Aider, Ken Welsh, administered first aid to one of their group who had pulled a tendon in her leg.

We met many members from the Sierra Hiking Club of California (one of their group died of heat exhaustion while on a seldom-used and difficult side trail). Many Boy Scouts and their leaders were in the Canyon, too.

We arrived at Indian Gardens in about four to five hours. After a short rest, our President, Ken Welsh, called a special meeting and presented our Club Membership Cards and a Grand Canyon Trail-Blazer Patch to all members present. Right afterwards, Cecil Armstrong, Sr. and his four grandsons, left Indian Gardens for the top of the rim to see how Cecil, Jr. and Susan were doing. By this time, Cecil, Sr. was getting rather tired, and at the last rest house, (1.5 miles from the Rim), Cecil met an English student from Yale University who offered to carry Cecil's pack to the top. This young student would take no money; he just wanted to help a fellow hiker in trouble.

We might mention here that this type of friendship and comradeship was noticed during the entire hike. Each hiker helping out the other in small ways, but very important to each other. We all shared a wonderful companionship and feelings of thoughtfulness and patience with one another.

We had a very restful and relaxing time at Indian Gardens. It was 1,500 feet higher than Phantom Ranch Campgrounds, so therefore, much cooler. We enjoyed our 'cat naps' and watching other hikers stop by our campsite near the water faucet. Sometimes, it seemed like it was Grand Central Station, with so many people coming and going. Three of our very energetic hikers, Marion Moore, Margo De La Garza _ and Ron Raths hiked to Plateau Point, which was a 3-mile round trip, to view the Colorado River 1,500 feet below.

Dorothy Vercruysse entertained our group by changing from hiking clothes to a brightly flowered Pant Dress and thongs for relaxing around the campsite.

We were catered to by some of our older children who experimented with dehydrated food and gave out samples. We also had 'real-live' Pop Corn; perhaps the first time it has ever been served in the Grand Canyon Campground. This was by compliments of Marion Saylor, who carried it in her pack. In the early evening hours, we were entertained by Elton Buell and his harmonica, and some of us joined in with group singing. The rest of us tried to get some sleep.

At 7 p.m. the Saylor's (Marion, her husband Russell, and son Perry) decided to head for the top of the rim as they wanted a soft bed to sleep in the rest of the night: They were tired of sleeping on the hard ground. Perry was pestered by bats flying around his head while on the trail.

Elton Buell convinced many of us that hiking in the moonlight with a full moon is really great: It was also to our advantage to hike in the cool of the night, as the steepest and roughest part of the hike was ahead of us. All but a few of us decided to leave Indian Gardens at midnight and 1 a.m. for the last lap of our journey. Due to the beautiful brilliance of the full moon, it was not necessary for us to use our flashlights on the trail. We had only one problem: When we arrived at the first rest house, we had to stumble over 'bodies' of sleeping hikers to get to the drinking water. This also happened at the last rest house - (1.5 miles from the rim). Some of our group found this last rest house to be very inviting and took an hour's nap or so, even though it was unusually cold at 4 o'clock in the morning!

The upper Bright Angel Trail was quite a grind - each trail erosion log seemed to grow in stature and no end to the switchbacks: There was a constant prayer among us that if we could get one foot over a log, there would be strength left to get the other foot up and over:

During this last part of our hike, we watched the Canyon walls change as moonlight dimmed and daylight emerged. It really was a beautiful sight and experience to see the Canyon by moonlight. We also heard the birds waking up, so knew that the sun would soon be rising.

After many, many rest stops and 'breathers' the midnight group "topped out" at 5:30 a.m., about 21 hours and 4 miles of an up (and seemed like forever) upward trail. We all were very elated to reach the top, footsore, but happy. Emotions were felt by all who had accomplished this GREAT ADVENTURE:

Special comment by Gordon Wagner:

While climbing a mountain puts much of the effort at the beginning and the elation in the middle, hiking the Grand Canyon saves both the major effort and the conquest for the end. And so, the APS hikers ended their major hike of the year. It was an experience shared with friends during the Centennial Celebration of Major Powell's first trip through the Grand Canyon (and the Fiftieth Anniversary of Grand Canyon National Park) --- and yet, was as personal as any do-it-yourself adventure.

Written by: Ken Welsh and Dorothy Vercruysse
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