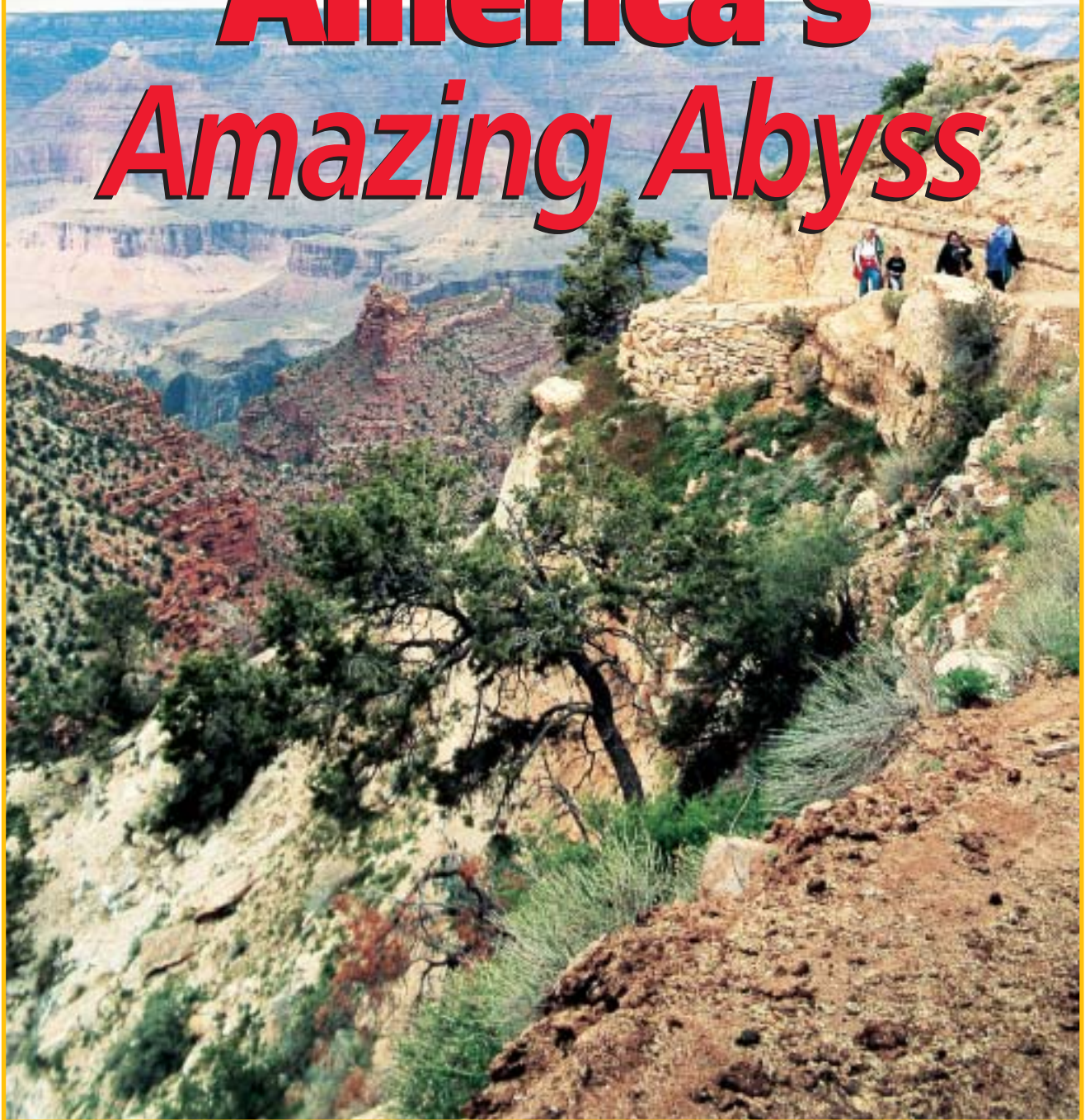




America's *Amazing Abyss*





The vast American southwest is nirvana to outdoor enthusiasts. My husband, Guy, and I have vacationed in Arizona at least a dozen times during the last 12 years and have even ventured as far northwest as Flagstaff. But until recently, we had never traveled to the Grand Canyon.

The slight wasn't intentional. Because our visits to the Southwest are usually in winter — at a time when Arizona's high country, the Colorado Plateau, where the canyon is located — is often under many feet of snow and experiencing hurricane-speed winds, we had stayed away. However, a recent spring visit to Arizona and, finally, the Grand Canyon's South Rim, revealed what we had been missing.

Though we've driven through the Grand Canyon's lesser sibling, the Salt River Canyon, many times — and, hence, were no strangers to magnificent gorges — there's still nothing to prepare a person for that first glimpse of America's most famous canyon. The Salt is phenomenal, no doubt — it's just that the Grand Canyon, which became a national park in 1919, is so much grander. Putting the scope of it into words is like trying to define infinity.

There are several ways to reach the canyon, all of them scenic. Motor-



homers can park their coaches at the train depot in Williams, then ride for two hours on the Grand Canyon Railroad — though unless you spend the night at one of the park's many lodges, this option doesn't leave you much time to enjoy the canyon's offerings.

There also are several highways that lead there: U.S. Highway 180 north from Flagstaff, or U.S. Highway 89 north to Cameron then Arizona Highway 64 west — two routes that arc through the pine-studded San Francisco Mountains, skirting the highest point in Arizona, 12,633-foot-high

Humphreys Peak — as well as Arizona Highway 64 north from Williams.

The best place to begin a tour of the South Rim is at Grand Canyon Village, where the attractions are many. However, to get there you must park your vehicle at one of the parking lots or park campgrounds, then walk (if you're hardy) or ride the free shuttle bus (the best bargain in the park).

The lodges that overlook the canyon are here (Thunderbird, Kachina and Bright Angel), as are historic Hopi House, rustically

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The Grand Canyon welcomes all coaches — gas, diesel or steam!

■ PAMELA SELBERT

Hikers climb up toward the South Rim from one of the many trails within the Grand Canyon (far left). A mule train emerges from the canyon following a ride up the steep trail (inset). An antique passenger locomotive, a '50s-vintage diesel, awaits passengers boarding at the old depot at Williams (top, left). El Tovar, a rustically elegant hotel and restaurant, is perched on the very edge of the canyon — giving it the grandest backyard possible. Across from El Tovar sits Hopi House, a re-creation of an ancient pueblo. Motorhoming to the park is easy and the rustic campgrounds are pleasant.

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elegant El Tovar Hotel and Lookout and Kolb Studios. Bright Angel Trailhead, which funnels hikers onto a strenuous route into the canyon, also is here.

Hopi House, which looks like a rather modern interpretation of an ancient Indian pueblo (and turns out to be just that) has been a *National Historic Landmark* since 1987. It was designed by renowned Southwest architect, Mary Colter, and built largely by Hopi workmen using native wood and stone, said Maureen Oltrogge, public affairs officer for the National Park Service.

The Harvey Company opened Hopi House in 1905, selling Native American arts and crafts. Shops there still sell gorgeous Navajo and Hopi jewelry of silver, coral and turquoise, along with fine Navajo rugs, basketry and other items. Wandering among the displays is like touring a museum.

El Tovar, also dating from 1905, is across the courtyard. Over a gour-

met lunch (half a portion of grilled chicken salad was enough for two) in the Teddy Roosevelt Room, we read its history. Construction of the hotel, using native boulders and Oregon pine, began a few years after the Santa Fe Railroad first reached the Grand Canyon. The 100-room structure was named for Spanish explorer Pedro de Tovar, who led the first expedition to Hopi Indian country 365 years earlier.

The Harvey Company, which began building and operating first-rate hotels along the Santa Fe route in 1876, was selected to run this sumptuous new hotel, which had greenhouses for growing fruit and vegetables, a steam generator to power electric lights, even its own dairy. (In addition to the restaurant at the hotel, there are several other restaurants, cafés and cafeterias at the canyon.)

Kolb Studio, also on the *National Register of Historic Places*, was built as a photographic studio by brothers

Emery and Ellsworth Kolb in 1904 and later expanded. The Kolbs were the first to make a motion picture of a white water run on the Colorado River through the canyon. Emery Kolb also sold curios and showed his movie at the Swiss chalet-style studio until his death in 1976. The fascinating building now holds a bookstore, operated by the Grand Canyon Association, and an art gallery.

For a look into Grand Canyon's cultural history, it's recommended that visitors make time for the Tusayan Museum, a small pueblo ruin located three miles west of Desert View (or 20 miles east of the Village) on Arizona Highway 64. There is no admission charge to the ruins; a self-guided trail provides a glimpse into life in a pueblo more than 800 years ago. Exhibits at the museum also tell the story of today's Hopis, who claim the ancient pueblo dwellers, the Hisatsinom, as their ancestors, and feature other local tribes.

Special interpretive programs (which change both seasonally and year-to-year) are offered daily by park rangers. During our visit, programs included "Glimpses of the Past" (at Tusayan Museum), helping visitors to understand how the pueblo dwellers survived this harsh climate, and "Splendor of Time and Canyon" (at Lipan Point, 1½ miles west of Desert View), which interprets the canyon as a special spiritual place to which people have been drawn for centuries.

For visitors who want to learn more about the park, other ranger programs are also offered daily at Grand Canyon Village. "Remnant Impressions: Fossil Walk" includes a half-mile stroll among the remains of brachiopods, sponges and other marine creatures that lived here 270 million years ago when the area lay under a tropical sea, while "Wings over the Canyon: Condor Talk" is a half-hour introduction to the magnificent, highly-protected birds that are sometimes seen in the canyon.

Other programs include two of particular interest to rockhounds. "Read the Rocks: Geology Walk" is a half-mile walk along the rim observing how the canyon came to be, while at "Introduction to Grand Canyon's Geology Talk" a ranger explains the

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formation of the huge gorge. As we learned, about 70 million years ago a large chunk of what would become the southwestern United States began rising. A collision of tectonic plates pushed the Colorado Plateau from near sea level to more than 10,000 feet high. Then, as water drained off the western slopes of the southern Rockies and flowed over the plateau, it carried sand, gravel and rocks that

ground down through the ancient stony layers. Even so, after all the millennia of grinding, the bottom of the canyon (below the South Rim) is still 2,450 feet *above* sea level.

The ranger explained that the canyon, which ranges in width from eight to 16 miles, began to be carved some six million years ago. The eroding continues today, not only by the scouring of the Colorado River, but also by running water from rain, snowmelt and tributary streams.

One of the streams is Bright Angel Creek which, along with a trail of similar name, follows the Bright Angel Fault. I joined three other hikers for a trek into the canyon following the trail (a steep route, according to park literature). Gritty with loose stones, edged by boulders and gnarled junipers and pinyons, the trail zigzags to the floor of the canyon.

Bright Angel winds nine miles to the bottom of the canyon, though

we only ventured down a couple of miles. In fact, park rangers advise hikers not to go all the way to the Colorado River and back in a day (and also warn against such health hazards as hypothermia, heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and hyponatremia, brought on by drinking too much water and not taking in enough salt).

Several hundred species of birds, mammals and reptiles call Grand Canyon home, but on the hike we saw few other than chipmunks, squirrels and a handful of raucous jays. Farther away, a raptor rode a thermal in slow circles, and though I hoped it was a California condor, I couldn't tell for sure.

At our farthest point into the canyon I sat awhile on a convenient boulder to listen to the quiet and watch the subtle drama of light playing out on the massive stone walls. No breeze was stirring, hikers on the trail are not supposed to talk and even chatter filtering down from the rim

Camping In the Canyon

Inside the park:

Mather Campground (operated by the National Park Service): No hookups are available, but a dump station is nearby. Campsites cost \$15 per night. Reservations may be made by calling SPHERIX at (800) 365-2267. For daily campsite availability and reservation details, check at the campground entrance.

Trailer Village: Sites with hookups are located next to Mather Campground. The cost is \$25 per site per night for two people, \$2 for each additional person over age 16. Campers may register at the entrance to Trailer Village, or reservations may be made with Xanterra Parks and Resorts (888) 297-2757.

Desert View Campground: Located near the East Entrance, 25 miles from Grand Canyon Village. Self-registration; first-come/first-served, \$10 per site per night.

Outside the park:

Camper Village: A commercial campground located seven miles south of Grand Canyon Village, in the town of Tusayan. Fees range from \$15-\$23. Hookups and coin-operated showers are available. For information, call (877) 638-2887.

Tex-X Campground (operated by Kaibab National Forest): Located two miles south of Tusayan. Costs \$10 per site per night; no hookups or showers. For information, call (928) 638-2443. — P.S.

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Travel by Train

There is no wrong way to get to the Grand Canyon, but an alternative to driving a motorhome is to stop in Williams, Arizona, and take the Grand Canyon Railway (reservations are recommended), which first carried passengers to the canyon's South Rim more than 100 years ago. The train, which takes just over two hours, was an improvement over the bone-bruising one- to two-day stagecoach ride from Flagstaff.

During the 67 years after its inaugural run in 1901, millions of travelers from all over the world rode the 65 miles to the canyon on the spur operated by the Santa Fe Railroad. But as travel by automobile grew popular, seats on passenger trains became increasingly empty, said Jerry Thull, formerly public relations manager of the railway.

In 1927, more than 70,000 visitors reached the Canyon's South Rim by train. Six years later, the number had dwindled to just over 11,000 — but more than 73,000 automobiles entered the park. In 1968, when the Santa Fe stopped service to the canyon, the last train carried three passengers.

But, says Thull, "the legend wouldn't die." The line was purchased by Max and Thelma Biegert, who in 1989 put the Grand Canyon Railway back on track. "Our passengers get a feel for what it was like to visit the Grand Canyon during the glory days of railroading," Biegert noted. The train now carries more than 180,000 visitors to the canyon annually.

Historic steam engines and diesels pull trains of up to 15 restored vintage cars, most from the 1920s, including an observation-dome car and luxury-parlor car. Cars hold 90 passengers; if more cars are needed, a second round trip is added, leaving Williams' 1908 depot soon after the first.

Daily trips are available except for Christmas Eve and Christmas. For information, contact the Grand Canyon Railway, (800) THE-TRAIN. — P.S.

was muted by the hugeness. Clouds drifted like slow ships along the North Rim, passing behind mighty stair-step bluffs that afternoon light had glazed purple and mauve. Almost imperceptibly, as you watch, the light shifts and colors change, roaming the spectrum from smoke blue to rich burgundy.

Over our heads, the bluffs formed a tan sine wave stained black with streaks of "desert varnish," magnesium that seeps in with water from the porous rock. Pedestals of stone, whittled by wind and water into spindles, support enormous boulders in an awesome display of balancing acts.

Far below, a caravan of a dozen mules and riders clopped into view. After a long time they reached us. We leaned tight against the stone wall and waited for the weary creatures to slog past — not the tiny burros they had seemed, but mules seemingly as tall and sturdy as draft horses.

According to one member of our group, there is a large corral of mules at the canyon and no mule makes the difficult voyage more often than once

every three days. We followed them out, though not at as steady a pace.

There are other trails: South Kaibab, Grandview, Hermit and the Rim Trail, which, unlike the others named, follows the relatively level rim for miles and, for much of its length, is paved and wheelchair-accessible. It's a lovely trek among thick-trunked pines, the terrain is easy and dogs are allowed.

But they will wait for another time. The grandeur of the canyon is such that few vacationers arrive with enough time to do and see everything. There are other reasons to come back, as well, such as a white water rafting trip (they range from three to 18 days), or for one of the elegant rugs we saw at Hopi House. We're already making plans — and next time, we may not wait until spring. ■

For More Info

Arizona Office of Tourism, (888)
520-3434, arizonaguide.com.
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