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DOING THE GRAND CANYON

by

JOHN T. McCUTCHEON

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BY THE AUTHOR

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H. L. L. - Grand Canyon -

DOING *the* GRAND CANYON

BY JOHN T. MCCUTCHEON

ILLUSTRATED WITH CARTOONS BY THE AUTHOR

IN describing the Grand Canyon, one should go into a course of literary training and gradually work up to it. He should start off on the Bay of Naples, do that until he has perfected it, then tackle the sunset on the domes and minarets of Stamboul and work on that until he can do it in bogie. Then sunrise on Mount Rigi, the Vale of Cashmir, and other star attractions of nature. Perhaps by this method he might be able to make a try at the Canyon. The great climbers do not begin by ascending a Matterhorn or an Aconcagua the first thing. They do some foothill work first and then by steadily increasing the magnitude of the climb finally are able to negotiate the great peaks. Actors go through years of preparation before they reach their goal—Hamlet well done. Pianists work for years with their ambitions fastened on Liszt's Rhapsodie Hongroise. Violinists work up to Beethoven's Concerto—and so on. When a writer has tackled everything in the line of fancy descriptive writing, he crowns his life work with a pen picture of the Grand Canyon—called by some: "The Greatest Show on Earth." For descriptions of the Canyon, see other writers.

The casual tourist approaches the Canyon with some dread. He fears that he will be disappointed. Surely nothing in nature can equal the expectations of one who has read what great writers have written about this wonderful place. He also fears



"In silent contemplation."

that if he is disappointed, it may probably be his own fault rather than the Canyon's. It would hurt his pride to be considered as lacking in capacity to appreciate the great beauties of nature, and so, to play safe, he resolves to do full justice to the occasion if it costs him all the adjectives at his command.

It isn't much trouble to reach the Grand Canyon any more. A Pullman Sleeper takes you up to within a couple of hundred yards, and you are supposed to walk the rest of the way. As the time nears when you must meet the test of seeing the Masterpiece of Nature, you experience a peculiar agitation of expectancy. The last mile of railroad riding gives no warning of what lies only a few rods away. When the train stops you climb a flight that leads to the hotel and purposely avoid glancing over in the direction of the Canyon for fear of getting a premature view which would take away the surprise of the supreme moment. You determine that you shall get all the thrill that is possible in one sudden compact shock.

You register leisurely so that you may compose yourself for the supreme moment when you are to get more sightseeing in one glance than is possible any place else in the world—a hole a mile deep and thirteen miles wide, filled with gigantic mountain peaks painted all the colors of the rainbow and fashioned in such beautiful symmetry as to make them seem like great masterpieces of architecture.

The Hotel El Tovar stands near the rim of the Canyon with a level stretch of a hundred feet lying between it and the very edge. A low parapet marks the edge and a number of benches are ranged along for the silent contemplation of the view. Beyond the wall there is nothing. It is as though the wall marked the end of the world and the begin-

DOING THE GRAND CANYON



“No danger if you don't fall off.”

ning of infinity. It is not until the sightseer reaches the edge that the full force of the view strikes him with a shock that makes him gasp. All of his set speeches which he has prepared are forgotten as he stands rooted and trembling before the overwhelming spectacle, afraid to utter the adjectives that seem such meager expressions of his emotions.

Silently he stands, gaping at the frightful immensity of the view, and half shrinking from the dreadful depths that shoot thousands of feet directly downward before him. It is as though the world had suddenly dropped away, leaving one clinging on the very edge, with fascinated eyes fixed on mountains so vast and so unexpected as to seem unreal. The sense of unreality is so strong that one imagines himself standing in the middle of a cyclorama building looking at a painting of highly colored mountains and mysterious gorges, so wonderfully done as to suggest an infinity of space. The silence aids in this delusion, and one half expects to go down some steps out into the noise and reality of a street again.

When you speak it is in the hushed respectful tone you would use at a funeral. Any loud exuberance of speech would be irreverent. You have the same awed feeling, multiplied a thousand times, that one experiences as he leans over the tomb of Napoleon in the great shadowy dome of the Hotel des Invalides.

Along the parapet stand silent figures entranced by the wonder of the scene. On the benches sit other figures, all spellbound and awed into silence by the brooding wonder that lies before them. It is like looking into another world—different from anything you have ever seen before.

When I first saw the Canyon a snowstorm was



"The start from the hotel."

McGraw-Hill

raging over one portion of it. Blue-black clouds were boiling out of the gorges and giving a weird mystery to the Canyon that was anything but earthly. In a moment brilliant red peaks changed to blue as the shadow of the storm swept over them. Great mountains faded in the mist and a moment later reappeared like domes of a city rising from the sea. Off in another part of the Canyon the evening sun was shining brilliantly and down in a gorge a furious rain storm was raging. Stretched before us were all kinds of weather—snow, rain, and sunshine—reminding one of the old-fashioned steel engravings wherein shafts of sunlight streamed down through great boiling masses of silver-tipped clouds—except that instead of black and white, there were blue and dark purple, orange and rosy tint, and wreaths of fleecy clouds whirling in and out of the silent gorges.

I couldn't help thinking of what the old Spanish explorers thought four hundred years ago when they accidentally stumbled, without a moment's warning, on a scene like this. What a shrugging of shoulders there must have been!

As we sat in the comfortable hotel rotunda that evening, surrounded by everything that goes to make life pleasant and comfortable, there would come moments of silence as though each one was vainly struggling to realize that only a few feet away on the right lay that awful brooding chasm, as deep as the ocean and as profoundly silent as the stars.

The real excitement of a trip to the Canyon lies in the ride down one of the trails to the river, a mile below the rim. Most people go down by the Bright Angel Trail, which leads directly down from the Hotel El Tovar, and on which the round trip may be done in about eight hours. The motive



"As they will describe it back home."

power is mule-back, reenforced by a small switch which seems to have little persuasive effect, but imparts a sportylike jauntiness to the rider.

At nine o'clock the caravan assembles in full view of the hotel, much to the dismay of portly ladies in divided skirts who would naturally prefer a less ostentatious start. A cowboy guide has previously determined the number of passengers that the mules are to carry, and one sturdy animal is provided for each passenger. When the latter marches bravely out of the hotel, garbed in borrowed or extemporized riding outfit and with his trusty camera girded about his shoulders, the cowboy asks him (or her) how much he (or she) weighs, and then allots a mule of proportionate strength. Many a mule has been deceived in the weight of ladies of great atmospheric displacement. There is much laughter and some nervousness as the adventurers launch themselves, or are launched, into the saddles and the cowboy guide starts gallantly off, followed by a stately and very deliberate caravan of old ladies, young ladies, old gentlemen, young gentlemen, and occasionally a child. There is much forced gayety, but each one is thinking about perils that lie ahead and reassuring himself with the reflection that no one was ever lost in this daring feat, which he now is committed to. The presence of one old lady will have a wonderful effect in bracing up the courage of the whole party. "If she can do it, why, surely I ought to be able to." A few hundred yards from the hotel the caravan turns in toward the Canyon, and the trusty mules with their precious cargoes begin picking their way down the Bright Angel Trail.

The first six or seven hundred feet of the descent is along a snow-covered icy trail that zigzags down

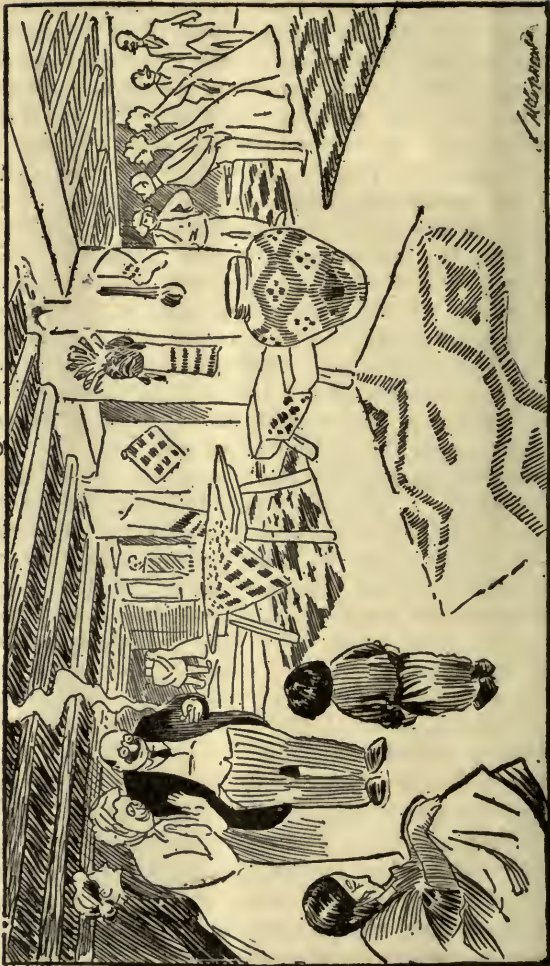


"The dare-devil photographer."

at a dizzy angle. Nervous passengers shut their eyes and trust to the mule, whom they hope is as anxious to get home safely as the rider. Of course, when the mule slips there are anxious moments in which the rider wonders how recently the mule was shod, but the latter does not seem to be at all uneasy about the matter. He picks his way downward with deliberate, business-like certainty. He is probably thinking about something to eat. A short way below the rim occurs the first adventure. The caravan is halted while a young man takes a photograph of the crowd. When you return in the evening finished copies will be ready for you, if you wish to purchase them. Of course everybody buys a copy, for who would not give the required amount to have eternal evidence of his daring Israel-Putnam-like dash down the Grand Canyon?

The photographer is very crafty, for he posts his camera in a position overhead that makes the trail look twice as steep as it really is. And that will please you, for in after years when you tell your friends about the memorable ride, you can show them how steep the trail was, and how daring you must necessarily have been to plunge down those ice-bound ledges. Usually, however, the presence in the photograph of some peaceful old lady detracts much from the heroism and daredevil character of your ride.

Of course there *is* a certain amount of danger in going down the Bright Angel Trail. In places this path clings to the face of some dizzy precipice and winds down zigzag ledges that make the rider instinctively shrink away from the outer edge. If the mule should slip, all would be over. BUT—the mule doesn't slip, consequently there is no real danger. The trail is never as narrow or as steep as you



"In the Hopi House."

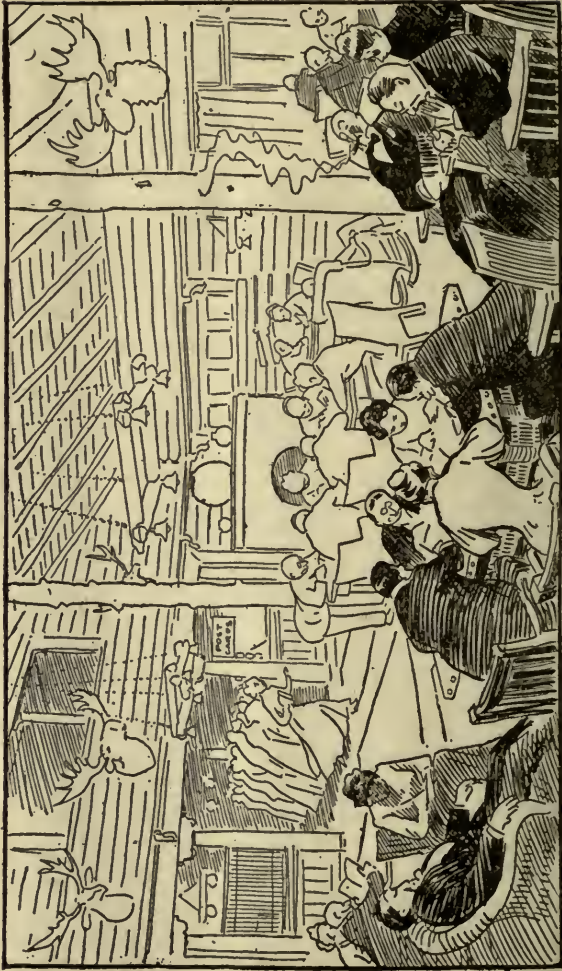
will describe it when you get back home. If it were, no living animal could possibly make the trip safely.

One has many things to think of on the ride down. In the first place, there is the possibility of the mule slipping. That is a thought much patronized by the riders. Then there is a chance of a hundred-ton rock being dislodged some place above and bouncing on your head as it passes skipingly to points below. Then there is the thought of fainting, or of vertigo, and other pleasant things to occupy the time, and last, but not least, the glad thought that no one has ever been killed or seriously hurt on the trail, and that lots of elderly people make the trip without minding it.

In the meantime the guide is answering time-honored questions, such as: "Was anyone ever killed on this trail?" "How often do you shoe your mules?" "Where do we have lunch?" "How high is that cliff?" "What makes the stone so red?" "How old is the Canyon?" "Who discovered it?" and "Isn't it remarkable how much those mountains look like old ruins of castles?"

The guide cheerfully gives the required information, whether he knows it or not. It doesn't much matter, for the questioner has asked another before getting the last one answered.

Thirty-four hundred feet below the rim is a beautiful broad plateau on which is situated the little collection of tent cottages called the Indian Gardens. A good spring, a little patch of cultivated garden land, and a sort of a halfway house where cool drinks may be purchased, constitute the settlement. Many people come down and spend the night in the tents, thereby getting an experience which enables them to say afterwards, "When I was roughing it out in Arizona." A long ride across



"The picture-post-card hour."

the plateau leads one to the brink of the granite gorge, within which flows, fifteen hundred feet below, the angry, sullen waters of the Colorado River. At one time this plateau was laid out in town lots, for the mining prospectors had reported valuable iron pyrites, and they thought that a fine mining camp would be built up. But this discovery was not of value, and the dreams of a Canyon metropolis went vanishing. Nowadays there are only a few mining claims in the Canyon, most of which are valueless, but are held in the hope that the railroad company will buy them rather than have the scenery mused up with holes and dump heaps.

The ride down to the river from the Indian Gardens is thrilling, especially the Devil's Corkscrew. This section of the trail—a six-hundred-foot drop down a terrifying zigzag of trail—is not recommended to people who don't like mountain climbing. The path is so steep that riding is unsafe, and the descent and ascent must be made on foot.

By one o'clock you eat your lunch at the edge of the river, with minds somewhat clouded by the realization that you have to go back every foot of that long trip you have come. You do it, however, and at five o'clock the caravan returns like triumphant explorers to the hotel at the top. You look for an easy chair—soft preferred—and discuss with one another your various heroisms of the day.

Sunset is a widely advertised feature of the Grand Canyon. Every promontory that juts out over the chasm has its group of sun worshipers. Adjectives roll out in endless volume as the sun tints the clouds and peaks the most wondrous hues, and the profound depths of the gorges seem even more profound in their purple shadows. Every time a sightseer says something complimentary, a new



“—As in your sleep you dream of things infernal.”

peak blushes a rosy red. It is an explosion of color, a scrambled rainbow, a thousand square miles of riotous beauty. A man from Indiana who gazed at the scene in silent admiration for a half hour, shook his head and slowly remarked: "Well, sir, it does seem as though the Creator did it just to show what He could do when He tried." In front of the hotel the parade ground along the parapet is always a favorite spot for those who never tire of drinking in the new emotions that come with each succeeding moment. For the Canyon is never the same. There is always something new to see.

Gradually night closes in, and the scenery lovers return, exalted and tired, to the hotel. An hour later the great dining room is full of busy people, and the large lady who looked so funny in her divided skirts, now appears in a bewitching gown and with a slight impediment in her walk.

As we look around at the brilliant room, with its diners from every country in the world, it is hard to realize that we are in a remote desert country and that within one hundred miles are spots never yet explored by man, as well as scores of mountain peaks never yet scaled by adventurous climbers.

After dinner there is the Hopi House to visit. A native dance is scheduled, and an opportunity is offered to those who wish to invest in Indian relics and works of art. The house itself is built in imitation of a genuine Arizona Indian village—entirely of mud and poles—and full of gaily colored rugs of geometric Indian designs.

But the chief ordeal of the day is yet to come. When you go back to the hotel to smoke a final cigar in comfortable ease, you will observe a scene of frenzied activity. Every table is thronged by busy writers. It is the picture-post-card hour, and

people are writing cards to everybody they know. It makes you very ill at ease. The fever is hard to resist, and you feel as though you ought to be at work also. After vainly fighting against it for a while, you give up and join the picture-post-card gang. You buy a dozen because you get them cheaper that way, and then write to your six best friends, and finally finish up the other six by writing to the people who will wonder whose initials are signed to the cards.

By ten o'clock the lounging room is empty, and you go away to dream of frightful falls, of mules leaping down thousand-foot cliffs, and of rocks crashing down upon you, inflicting lasting injury. All through the night you have hairbreadth escapes and claw your bedclothes in impotent frenzy. You die a hundred deaths, but in spite of the great mortality you are ready for a good breakfast in the morning.

The Man from Indiana—

about whom Mr. McCutcheon tells, may have been right as to *why* the Grand Canyon was made.

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