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Early-Day Tourism in Rainbow Bridge Country

When Byron Cummings published his article on the natural bridges of southern Utah early in 1910, the whole country was alerted to the discovery of “the largest natural arch yet found.” Interviews with members of the discovery expedition appeared in newspapers and magazines from California to Massachusetts, and prints of Stuart M. Young’s spectacular photographs were convincing evidence of the beauty and grace embodied in this newest national monument. The adventure inherent in the discovery of Rainbow Bridge excited the interest and imagination of those travelers who yearned for a challenge and had time on their hands, and it became the trip of a lifetime for the hearty souls who journeyed to the Four Corners country to see this natural wonder for themselves.

However, the fact that the bridge was now on the map did not make it any more accessible than it had ever been. There was still no trail that anyone could actually follow on the ground, and the route was precarious for even the most seasoned horseman. For the less experienced, the slickrock domes, steep canyons, and vast, waterless vistas could be dangerous and even deadly. Thus, for the first few decades of the twentieth century, a visit to Rainbow Bridge National Monument necessitated the use of a guide and packer who could supply the adventurer with all the basic necessities and provide a reasonably safe trip into and out of what is even today a very isolated and rugged landscape.

For virtually everyone prior to the mid-1920s that guide and packer was John Wetherill. Not only did he know the way to the bridge, but his trading post at Oljato was ideally situated as a point of embarkation and supply. From his headquarters, John could also take tourists to Keet Seel, Betatakin, and Navajo Mountain as well. The well-publicized discovery of Nonezoshe gave the Wetherills a good deal of notoriety, and it was not long before tourists began arriving at their door. In fact, the discovery party had barely arrived back at Oljato before Mr. Wetherill returned to the trail, guiding his first travelers to the great arch. According to the visitor register, which John Wetherill established and kept in a coffee can under the east end of the arch, the first party guided in was a couple from New York, Arthur and Helen Townsand, who visited Rainbow Bridge on August 29, 1909. This visit occurred before any publicity about the discovery had even reached nearby communities. It seems probable, therefore, that the Townsands just happened to be traveling in the vicinity of Oljato, heard about the bridge from members of the Utah Archaeological Expedition, and straightaway hired Hosteen John to take them there.

In 1910 Wetherill led three parties to the bridge. The first was in July and consisted of two people from Carson City, Colorado; the other two parties visited in August, the earlier a party of three from Chicago, and the last a party of four from New York. One unusual aspect of these early expeditions concerns the
Figure 27. The Wetherill Trail was the route John Wetherill established to take tourists from his new trading post at Kayenta to Rainbow Bridge. Until 1925 it was virtually the only way to get to the bridge.

number of women visiting the bridge. Of the eleven people who Wetherill guided there those first two years, five were female. William B. Doulgass had written in his field diary that due to the difficulty of the journey, no women would likely be interested. He was proved wrong within two weeks of making that notation.

The route Wetherill took from Oljato to the bridge in those early years probably approximated the route taken by the discovery expedition, down Copper Canyon, over Paiute Mesa, and across the Rainbow Plateau via Bald Rock Canyon, Surprise Valley, and Bridge Creek. The topography does not allow for a more direct route, and this was certainly a relatively safe trail with watered campsites and some feed for the horses. There is evidence that Wetherill improved the route somewhat, especially the steep section from Nokai Canyon to the top of Piute Mesa, thereby making it more congenial for his customers and easier on his pack animals. Stan Jones has walked the whole route and reports that the trail can still be followed today, although a large slide near the top of Piute Mesa has badly damaged one short section.1

When the Wetherills moved their trading post to Kayenta in 1911 a new route to the bridge became not only possible but preferable. Heading almost due west from his new home, Wetherill could take his customers over Marsh Pass and into Tsegi Canyon. Here there were any number of good springs where the parties could camp while visiting the great ruins
of Keet Seel and Betatakin, now protected within the boundaries of Navajo National Monument. Exiting via Bubbling Springs Canyon, they would then cross the upper end of Pinto Canyon and round the east end of Navajo Mountain via the same route followed by Douglass and the government party on their way back from Rainbow Bridge. Wetherill consistently used Surprise Valley along Nasja Creek as the last camp before plunging the final rugged eight miles past Oak Creek and down the east fork of Bridge Canyon. One night was usually spent under the bridge, and the return journey followed the same trail in reverse. It was an incredibly scenic and rewarding trip over a route that presented only a few difficulties and one which could be negotiated by a novice horseman, provided the mount was experienced. By making a few trail improvements and carefully marking his route, Wetherill soon had a relatively safe, reliable trail which could be ridden in about four to five easy days each way. This route was called the Wetherill Trail early on, and some maps give it that designation to this day.

The difficulty of a trip to the bridge was compounded by the problem of even getting to the trailhead at Kayenta. The nearest rail stops were at Flagstaff on the west or Gallup to the east, but even when the traveler had disembarked at one of these relatively remote settlements his problems had only begun. There was little that even approximated a road from either place to or through the Indian country of the Four Corners, and visitors to the region often found themselves confronting dust storms, flash floods, blazing heat, or numbing cold. The journey from Flagstaff to Kayenta via Tuba City could be expected to take five days if conditions were favorable. If they weren't, the journey could end up taking several days more, or might even be impossible. It is little wonder, then, that from 1909 to 1922 Wetherill's register contains fewer than three hundred names, and that includes those few who hiked to the bridge from the Colorado River.

The mass media in those days was but a faint foreshadowing of the saturation levels we know today, but even had there been more opportunities the Wetherills' limited means would have prevented them from having much access to it. Hence, knowledge of Hosteen John's willingness to guide parties to the bridge was spread largely by word of mouth and by published book, magazine, and newspaper accounts written by those who made the trip. Of course, it helped enormously when such reports were written by men whose fame was able to command a national audience. One of the first such accounts was written by western author Zane Grey, who visited Rainbow Bridge on May 13, 1913. Grey was born on January 31, 1872, in Zanesville, Ohio, attended the University of Pennsylvania on a baseball scholarship, and, in 1896, settled down in New York City to practice dentistry. However, he had already been captivated by the craft of writing and gave up his promising professional practice to write novels. The turning point of his new career was a 1907 meeting with one Colonel C. J. "Buffalo" Jones, who let Grey spend some time with him on his ranch hunting and roping mountain lions near the Grand Canyon. The experience transformed Grey's life and career, and he spent the remainder of his days describing the West and his experiences in it.

For his trip to Rainbow Bridge, Grey hired not only John Wetherill but Nasja Begay and an old friend and guide from Flagstaff, Al Doyle. The party set out from Kayenta in early May, traveling the route through Tsegi Canyon and around Navajo Mountain which Wetherill had ridden many times before. For his part, Grey was totally fascinated by all he saw on the journey, and many scenes and characters gleaned from this trip became immortalized in his later novels and essays. The party narrowly averted a disaster when, just as the trail started into Bridge Creek, one of the horses fell and threatened to drag Wetherill and Joe Lee down with it. Only the quick thinking and strength of Lee saved the horse and its precious gear from being lost.

To say that Grey found the bridge enthralling would be a vast understatement. In an essay published in 1922 he wrote,

> This Rainbow Bridge was the one great natural phenomenon, the one grand spectacle which I had ever seen that did not at first give vague disappointment, a confounding of reality, a disenchantment of contrast with what the mind had conceived.

> But this thing was glorious. It absolutely silenced me. 4

Grey was also impressed by the wild and isolated character of the country. He wrote, "... after Doyle and I came out we admitted that we would not care to try to return over our back trail. We doubted if we could find the way." 5

That same summer Wetherill was privileged to guide an even more famous personality to the bridge,
Figure 28: Nasja Begay (?) and Zane Grey at Navajo Mountain, 1913. If authentic, this is the only known photograph of Nasja.
the twenty-sixth president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt. Having left office in 1909, and following an unsuccessful but spectacular run for the presidency as an independent in 1912, Teddy suddenly found himself at loose ends. He therefore filled his time by traveling, exploring, and writing his memoirs. His expedition to Rainbow Bridge was part of a larger excursion around the Southwest, which included a visit to the Grand Canyon and mountain lion hunting on the North Rim. In late July his party dropped down off Buckskin Mountain, rode east into House Rock Valley, and across the Marble Platform to Lees Ferry. Here they picked up wagons, supplies, and a Navajo guide, and then proceeded south along the Echo Cliffs to Tuba City and east to Kayenta, which they reached on August 9. As all members of the party were experienced horsemen, they traveled fast, and by August 12 they were riding down Bridge Canyon. Wetherill had his guests walk the last mile or so down the creek so that the visitors’ first impression would be of the immensity of the span. It was a strategy which apparently worked in Roosevelt’s case, for he wrote,

At last we turned a corner, and the huge arch of the Bridge rose in front of us. It is surely one of the wonders of the world. It is a triumphal arch rather than a bridge, and spans the torrent bed in a majesty never shared by any arch ever reared by the mightiest conquerors among the nations of mankind. 6

Testimonies such as those given by Zane Grey and Teddy Roosevelt increased the public awareness of the bridge, and by 1922 there were eighty visitors, nearly double the number that had arrived in any
previous year. Almost all these visitors would have traveled via the overland route, and John Wetherill probably guided most of them himself. His connection to the bridge became official when, in 1916, he was appointed the first custodian of Rainbow Bridge National Monument by the superintendent of the newly created National Park Service. He held this position for the next eight years at a salary of one dollar per year.

The automobile as a common mode of transportation was not slow in reaching the Southwest. The first such vehicle to reach the South Rim of the Grand Canyon arrived in 1902, and in 1909 two cars were driven across the Kaibab Plateau to the North Rim. By the end of World War I the “horseless carriage” was everywhere, and routes that had been mere trails or at best wagon tracks were becoming passable to motorized travel. By the early 1920s the route from Flagstaff to Kayenta was at least marginally accessible to the passenger car, making a journey to Rainbow Bridge a bit easier.

In June 1920 a group of four friends from Cleveland set out to make a grand tour, via rail and automobile, of northern Arizona. Arriving at the Petrified Forest on June 24, they proceeded to Grand Canyon, Sunset Crater, and Walnut Canyon before setting out on June 28 for the 160-mile drive to Kayenta. Even in a car it was a two-day trip, so the party was not on the trail to Rainbow Bridge until June 30. The members of the group were probably not experienced horsemen, so Wetherill kept to a leisurely pace. The party arrived at Rainbow Bridge on July 5, clearly worn out and somewhat let down by their experience. W. D. Sayle, one of the participants, wrote,

Not being particularly impressed with our first view [of the bridge]. . . Inscribed our names in the Guest Book provided by Mr. Wetherill and kept at the Bridge. Fewer than 150 people have visited the Bridge.9

Most of the people Wetherill guided to the bridge were probably little different from the tourists of this or any other age. A few, however, became so enamored of the scenery and so caught up in the mystique of the canyon country that they returned again and again and were to have an impact far beyond their presence as mere visitors. One such man was Charles L. Bernheimer. Born in Ulm, Germany, in 1894, Bernheimer emigrated to the United States in 1881 and began working as an office boy in New York City. By 1907 he had become president of his former employer, Bear Mill Manufacturing Co., and proceeded to amass a fortune in the manufacture of clothing.

Bernheimer became interested in the Four Corners country by reading Herbert Gregory’s 1917 work Geology of the Navajo Country, and he spent most of his summer vacations exploring the canyonlands and the Rainbow Plateau. He always hired John Wetherill as guide and packer, and together they explored a great deal of new country and made many discoveries of arches, Anasazi ruins, and pictograph panels. Bernheimer visited Rainbow Bridge first on May 23–24, 1920, via the Wetherill Trail and became somehow convinced that a route to the bridge from the west should be possible. In 1921 he was back at Kayenta and hired Wetherill to guide what turned out to be a truly amazing and extraordinarily difficult trip. The party left Kayenta on June 27 and headed west. They visited Betatakin and Inscription House and then followed the mesas and tributary canyons of Navajo Creek to the Colorado River, arriving there on July 2. The party thought they were camped at Crossing of the Fathers, but later found they were several miles too far upstream. They retraced their steps back up Navajo Canyon and camped for a time at the junction of Navajo and Kaibito Creeks. They next rode back up onto the Rainbow Plateau, their goal being, as Bernheimer wrote, to “travel down Ferguson Canyon to its junction with West Canyon [an early name of Forbidding Canyon], to descend the latter until it met the Bridge Canyon, then go up Bridge Canyon to Rainbow Bridge.” Bernheimer and Wetherill had clearly studied their geography, and what they planned certainly seemed feasible. However, once in Forbidding Canyon they were quick to discover their error. Bernheimer observed,

West [Forbidding] Canyon is difficult traveling; one cannot remain long in the canyon bottom because of the shelves of hard limestone. In pouring over these the flood waters had scooped out great pools beneath them which even now were filled with water. The shelves were so high that the animals could not go down them, and even if they had been able to do so we could not have afforded to have our food supply and baggage saturated.10

Early one morning John Wetherill volunteered to reconnoiter downstream on foot but returned by early
June 29 they had made themselves comfortable near TNT, dynamite, and black powder to force a passage which furnished us with strong and tough crowbars, without which our work would have been greatly retarded. The ascent was steep but otherwise unremarkable, and by getting the lay of the land off to the north. The stratagy paid off when they spotted a saddle (today's Yabut Pass) leading into Cliff Canyon, and by the diligent use of shovel, pick, and crowbar they made a route to it. The ride from the saddle to the floor of the canyon was steep but otherwise unremarkable, and by June 29 they had made themselves comfortable near a pictograph panel at a spot they aptly named Painted Rock Camp. They quickly confirmed that Cliff Canyon joined Forbidding Canyon, and a little exploration showed that this canyon, even down this far, was up to its old tricks. A short way below their camp the canyon became too narrow for a horse and soon after impassable for a man as well.

The goal of reaching Rainbow Bridge from the west seemed impossible to attain and the party was preparing to pack up when Wetherill noted a cleft in the wall behind their camp which seemed to be headed east. Exploration showed the west end to be steep, sandy, and rocky but otherwise passable. The east end, however, was anything but. The passage near the summit was barely wide enough for a man to squeeze through sideways, never mind a loaded pack animal. The far side was a nearly vertical rock mass containing a hole Bernheimer estimated to be forty feet deep. The party worked for six days, four of them on the east side, chiseling and blasting using TNT, dynamite, and black powder to force a passage through the slot and into Redbud Creek. By a nearly superhuman effort they at last succeeded in making a way sufficient for the pack animals to be led unloaded over the summit. The route was named Redbud Pass "in grateful recognition of a Redbud tree which furnished us with strong and tough crowbars, without which our work would have been greatly retarded." On July 9 the victorious party rode over the pass and on to Rainbow Bridge. Their pack animals and supplies were retrieved three days later, and the party returned to Kayenta via the Wetherill Trail, thereby completing the first circumnavigation of Navajo Mountain. Bernheimer wrote in the visitor register at the bridge,

By our reaching the Rainbow Arch at 10 a.m. today, we have succeeded to circumnavigate Navajo Mountain with 26 head of stock. My chief thought at this time is that posterity may recognize and appreciate the ability of John Wetherill at finding, constructing the trail through Redbud Pass which after four full days of labor yielded to his genius.

The next year, on May 21, 1923, Wetherill guided a party of four, including the first woman (L. A. Hoover) over the new route to the bridge.

Posterity does indeed recognize Wetherill's role in opening up this western approach to the great arch, but the accomplishment was to prove his undoing as the exclusive guide to Rainbow Bridge. Within three years the old Wetherill Trail was no longer in use and John Wetherill himself out of the business of guiding tourists to the Great Rock-Arch. An era in the history of the bridge was about to close, but a new and brighter one was about to begin.

This new age in Rainbow Bridge tourism was ushered in via the dreams and labors of two brothers, Hubert and S. I. Richardson. Their father, John W. Richardson, was born in Mississippi, but the family later settled in Memphis, Tennessee, and it was at this place that John W. grew up and prospered. Around 1876 he met and married Mary Jane McAdams, and together they produced a family of five sons and two daughters. S. I. (christened Samuel Irby) was born in 1878, Hubert in 1890. Their father ruled his family with an iron fist, and apparently was a man of rigid standards and little affection. His most infuriating propensity was to put his sons to work as soon as they were able and then take all their wages for the support of the family, even though the money was not needed for that purpose. Hence, both S. I. and Hubert left home as soon as they turned eighteen, and both came out to Arizona to work for their maternal uncles.

Their uncle George McAdams was the eldest of eighteen children, older by one year than his sister, Mary Jane. He arrived in the Navajo country in the late 1870s via Flagstaff, where he farmed for a time in an area now known as the Greenlaw Addition just east of town. When the railroad got close in 1882 he cut rail ties for a living, but then moved north and established a small trading post on Rabbit Mesa.
a few miles outside Tuba City. Two years later he moved further north and east, establishing a new trading post at Tonalea (Redlake), which stands to this day. When S.I. came out to Arizona in 1896 he clerked eighteen months for his uncle George at Redlake before moving on to other work in Flagstaff and Prescott. However, in 1899 George McAdams and S.I. formed a partnership and bought Wolf Post on the Little Colorado River. S.I. thereby found himself in the trading business, a profession which would keep him occupied for the rest of his life.6

George McAdams’s youngest brother, Joel Higgins (J.H.) McAdams, had come out to Arizona in 1895 and also got into the trading business. Hence, when Hubert Richardson came out west in 1908 he went to work almost immediately for his uncle at a post called Sunrise Springs and took over that store himself two years later. It was not long before virtually all the Richardson clan was in the trading business, and they grew remarkably adept at it. At one time or another the family owned major trading posts at the Gap, Shonto, Kaibito, Tuba City, Leupp, Cameron, Rainbow Lodge, and Inscription House, plus smaller outposts at other locations as well.7 In fact, it may be fairly stated that until the 1950s the Richardson family was a major backbone of the trading economy on the Navajo Reservation.

It is not exactly clear how the two brothers, S.I. and Hubert Richardson, got the idea for building a new lodge and trading post on Navajo Mountain. S.I.’s oldest son, Gladwell, says the idea was Hubert’s, inspired by a 1923 pack trip from Kaibito around the rugged canyons of the San Juan and Colorado Rivers to Rainbow Bridge.8 He also writes that the brothers were approached by Navajo Mountain headmen, Hosteen Indischee, Sagnetyazzia, and White Hat, to establish a post somewhere in the far northwestern corner of the reservation.9 The Indians of that area clearly were far from any trading establishment, and figured that a new post in their vicinity would benefit both their people and the white traders. They even had a location to offer: Endische (Willow) Springs on the southwest slope of Navajo Mountain.

What seems most probable is that Hubert’s trip to Rainbow Bridge provided inspiration, while the offer by the local Navajos provided opportunity. It is doubtful that trading alone would have persuaded the brothers to build and staff the trading post; in 1923 there were probably not enough Indians living around Navajo Mountain to make such a remote post particularly profitable. They hoped, rather, to cash in on the growing traffic to Rainbow Bridge, and the establishment of a post was a chance to secure the support of the local Navajos for the venture. The western route to the bridge, opened by Wetherill and Bernheimer the previous year, provided a golden opportunity for these ambitious entrepreneurs. After all, it was barely thirteen miles from Willow Springs to the bridge via the new route, while the Wetherill Trail from Kayenta was at least seventy miles. The Richardson plan, if it could be made a reality, would considerably reduce both the time and expense of a trip to the bridge. The key to it all would be the construction of a road from the vicinity of Tonalea to Navajo Mountain. Without it the trading post could not be profitably supplied and the tourists would be unable to reach the trailhead. What was needed was a feasible route, and in that wild and unforgiving country no one seemed sure that such a thing actually existed.

Fortunately, the Richardsons were well-acquainted with a Navajo gentleman, John Daw, who was very familiar with the Navajo Mountain country and was then residing at Redlake. He was ready to suggest a route almost immediately, the path known as the Ute War Trail. In earlier, less peaceful times the route had served for Navajo raids on the southern Utes and then, later on, the Mormon settlements further north. Now it lay unused and nearly forgotten, but Daw had been an army scout at Fort Defiance and offered to lead the Richardsons over the route and assist with road construction.

Permits had to be obtained from both the Indian Agency and the Department of the Interior to establish a trading post and to construct the new road, and here some opposition was experienced. Telegrams and letters were received from California, Washington, D.C., and the Indian country opposing the project, and the Richardsons blamed the Wetherills of Kayenta for fomenting the protests.10 These objections were all for naught, however, as the appropriate federal agencies were all enthusiastic about the development and employment potential the scheme offered the local Indians.

With permits in hand, all that remained was to start construction. Supplies and equipment were assembled at Cameron, and in the early spring of 1924 the Richardsons set off for Redlake and the beginning of the new road. S.I.’s youngest son, Cecil, and John Daw left first in a stripped-down Dodge car,
followed by Frank Mahan of Flagstaff and Hopi freighter Walter Lewis driving trucks loaded with supplies. "Several Hopi Indians from the nearby village of Moenkopi were hired to do road construction, and it was planned to hire additional help from among the local Navajos as the road progressed north. The idea was to construct a route, rough but passable to motor vehicles, which could be improved later as need and opportunity dictated. Supplies would be trucked in to the workers from Cameron and Tonalea over the new road as construction proceeded.

Daw's route proved to be practical, and construction moved along at a steady pace. Along the easier stretches it was only necessary to grub out the sagebrush; shallow watercourses were bridged by constructing dugways, and, where practical, sandhills were shoveled all the way to bedrock. At one very difficult point a "corduroy road" was constructed by laying pinyon and juniper logs directly on the sandy and pockmarked surface and cemented together with clay. Canyon crossings proved more intractable. When pick-and-shovel techniques proved inadequate, dynamite was used to carve a path down into the canyon and up the other side. Except for the obvious and solvable construction problems the project encountered few difficulties, and within a few weeks they reached the halfway point at Black Wash. Here everything came very close to ending in a bloody disaster.

Except for the Wetherills at Kayenta, this northern and western corner of the Navajo Reservation was unsettled by white men, and a large number of the local populace were determined to keep it that way. The Navajos of the area were quite traditional and ready to wage war not only on the occasional white intruder but on each other as well. The unifying authority of the old chief Hoskininni had been largely moral and spiritual, and at his death the various bands of Indians in the area became even more disconnected from any central tribal authority and even from other neighboring groups. It should not have surprised the Richardsons, therefore, that some Navajos of the Rainbow Plateau country saw the new
road not as a benefit but as a threat to their way of life.

The harassment at Black Wash began benignly enough with the tormenting of those Navajos hired to work on the road. When their road crew was chased off by these threats, S.I., Cecil, and John Daw were left to work on their own. They proceeded to blast 150 yards of road out of solid rock, and the hostile Navajos clearly saw that these were determined men. The threats now became more serious; Daw was told to leave his white companions and was promised that all found at the white men’s camp would be killed. For several days the small party was continually surrounded by angry Indians, but work on the road continued into the rough canyon country north of Black Wash. One mild skirmish resulted in nothing more than some shoving and a few harmless punches, but the threats were continuing and ominous. Even worse, supplies were running out, and a promised resupply was long overdue.

This seemingly desperate situation was relieved when Hosteen Indischee and several companions from Navajo Mountain rode into the construction camp and confronted the antagonists on their own terms. While certainly not a chief in the tradition of Hoskininni, Indischee could apparently claim a certain amount of suzerainty over the activities in this district, and at his word the war party melted into the trees, never to return. The promised supply convoy arrived from the south the next day, the Navajo work crew was reassembled, and construction swiftly proceeded north out of the canyons and onto the plateau to the very foot of Navajo Mountain itself.

The Richardsons blamed John Wetherill and the Navajos of Kayenta for these troubles, but the accusation seems a bit farfetched. The isolated bands of Indians in the area probably needed little motivation to go after this new white intrusion into their homeland, and the kind of threats made against the lives of the road crew are completely out of character for Hosteen John. As Frank McNitt was later to write,

... there was nothing about John Wetherill that to the observer was heroic and little that was even
colorful. He was an unassuming man of plain habits, plain talk, and plain shameless honesty."

It seems likely, therefore, that the Wetherill family's role in this incident was minimal to nonexistent. Besides, in their twenty-odd years of living on the Navajo Reservation they had seen enough development to know that it could not be stopped simply by sending out a few Indians to rough up a road construction crew.

At Haystack Rock just southwest of Navajo Mountain a new problem arose: the spring selected as the site for the trading post and trailhead could not be located. Looking back it seems odd that the Richardsons would indulge in mile after mile of backbreaking road construction without having the destination clearly in view, but that seems to be precisely what happened. Three days of searching proved fruitless, and the crew was close to abandoning the project altogether, but on the fourth day S.I. encountered Hosteen Indischee's son, Indischee Begay, and Slim Fingers out hunting horses. They led the party up the steep and rugged west slope of Navajo Mountain to a place where several springs bubbled out of the rock. The water had been hard to find because it flowed for only a short distance before being lost again into the ground. Happily, within a week after this discovery the road reached the site of Rainbow Lodge and Trading Post and the trucks were unloaded and sent south for building supplies. The new road from Redlake to Willow Springs was one hundred miles long and cost the Richardsons $50,000. Later improvement eventually shortened the route to about seventy miles, but it remained a long and bumpy drive for decades thereafter.

When the trucks returned, they brought the requisite supplies, three Mexican laborers skilled in building construction, and S.I.’s wife, Susan Annabelle, the first white woman to live at Navajo Mountain. The plan was to first build a large structure to house a dining hall, living quarters, and a trading post; seven guest cabins would be constructed later further up the mountain. The lodge building went up quickly. It was built of native stone with a roof of
Figure 34: Rainbow Lodge, ca. 1940, in its time the most remote tourist resort in the country.

CEDAR logs covered with a thick layer of packed clay. Considering the location and the scarcity of finishing materials, it was indeed a handsome structure. The nearby springs provided good culinary water, and the overflow ran in a small stream past the lodge, where it watered trees, vines, and flowers. The whole aspect of the place was thereby rendered verdant, comfortable, and marvelously scenic.

Only one obstacle remained to the start-up of the guide business from the lodge: construction of a trail which would get the horseback parties to Rainbow Bridge. Gladwell Richardson's account makes it clear that the Richarsons expected to find a serviceable trail leading off Navajo Mountain and over Redbud Pass into Bridge Creek. Apparently, the stories then circulating led them to believe that Bernheimer and Wetherill had spent several months in the summers of both 1921 and 1922 building trail, and when that proved to be totally inaccurate their disappointment must have been bitter. S.I. Richardson and Homer Arhn, who would later serve as the first tourist guide over this new route, were unable even to find the Wetherill route to Yabut Pass, so they, in effect, started from scratch. The first part of the trail went easily enough, with Indian laborers hired to assist with the pick and shovel work necessary around Dome and Horse Canyons. The switchbacks down into Cliff Canyon were provided with turnouts to be used for resting the stock on the way up. It was at Redbud Pass, however, that this frustration was the most acute. Much of the fill that Wetherill and Bernheimer had blasted into the holes on the east side had washed away, leaving the route once again impassable. According to Gladwell Richardson
it took $10,000 worth of dynamite to make the pass wide enough for stock animals. Various government agencies later widened it still more to the point where the present passage is nearly fifty feet lower than it was when traversed by Bernheimer in 1922. With the completion of the trail it was now possible to begin the tourist business in earnest, but, in point of fact, people had begun coming by the lodge even before the Richardsons were fully ready to accommodate them. The first name in the old visitor register was that of J. D. Walkup, secretary of the Flagstaff Chamber of Commerce, who stayed there on April 25, 1924. The same first page of the register contains the name of John Wetherill of Kayenta, who probably stopped by to wish the Richardsons well in their new venture.

Regularly scheduled horseback trips to the bridge from Rainbow Lodge began in the spring of 1925, and to advertise their new business the Richardsons published a brochure extolling the beauty of the country and detailing the services they were ready to provide. It explained that the trip from Flagstaff to Rainbow Lodge by automobile took a bit over twelve hours, and while extremely rough, was probably as scenic as any drive in the United States. Once at the lodge, travelers would sleep in the small guest cabins, take their meals in the dining room, and prepare for what to most would be the adventure of a lifetime. As the brochure explained,

The guide will take you to Rainbow Bridge. He will get you there safely and back as well. He will prepare your meals and give you every attention needed. A lady can make the trip with the same ease as a man, and everything has been done that is humanly possible to make the trip one of satisfaction, comfort, and delight.

The horseback trip to the bridge was an overnight excursion, and, true to their word, the Richardsons made every effort to make even this rustic adventure as comfortable as possible. While John Wetherill and his customers slept outdoors on the ground near the bridge itself, the Richardsons made use of a great alcove they named Echo Camp about a half-mile up canyon. Here they erected canvas tents with wooden floors and even provided their guests with beds and clean sheets. A cook shack was erected with all the facilities necessary for the preparation of high-quality meals. One traveler, writing in 1937, described the scene:

Half a mile from the Bridge a sheltering cliff hangs over a quiet pool of water, quiet but not stagnant as it is fed by springs the year around. The pool is surrounded by rushes and willows, home of hundreds of wrens and mocking birds. A spring, walled with rocks, furnishes water for cooking and drinking. As we ate our evening meal prepared by the guide over a camp fire, plenty of frogs began their “Serenade in the Night,” which cheered us to greater feats in devouring steaks and dutch-oven biscuits, peach jam, and cookies. We drank our coffee from pint cups.

Even with quality accommodations, good food, and a guide, the trip to Rainbow Bridge was still a rugged adventure in a very lonely and hostile wilderness, but the sheer inaccessibility of the place seemed only to heighten visitor appreciation of the Great Rock-Arch and its setting. Writing in 1940, Irvin S. Cobb exalted at length on the place it had cost him so much discomfort to reach. He described the bridge itself by saying,

... the crowning achievement of the huge area of uplifting magic in which it lies hidden ... a perfect symphony in pink sandstone ... with no vain ornaments to mar the surpassing grace of it, mind you; no superfluous curlicues to distract the fascinated eye from those altogether simple and most truly-scaled lines.

With the distance to the bridge much foreshortened by the new road and trail and with most of the rough edges of the journey removed by the Richardsons’ tender care, it is little wonder that visitation to the bridge began to increase substantially. Previous to 1925 the largest number of visitors to the bridge in any single year was 142 during 1923. In 1926 that figure was estimated at over 300. Still, the operation was not showing a profit. Gladwell Richardson reported that every year the lodge filled with guests, but the high cost of bringing in supplies from Flagstaff and Gallup ate up what profit there might have been. The trading post made money, but most of that was paid out to the local Indians for construction and maintenance of the road and trail. The Park Service helped out a bit by contributing $500 per year for upkeep of the trail, but due to the violence of summer thunderstorms and the resultant flash flooding, constant attention was the only way to keep these routes open and even marginally passable.
In 1939 Florence Sture, personal secretary to Arizona governor Bob Jones, wrote to the state highway commissioner regarding the route and its importance to the tourist trade in northern Arizona:

The road from Inscription House to Rainbow Lodge is now in deplorable condition; so bad in fact that it is impassable and those tourists who seek to make the trip to the lodge in order to visit Rainbow Natural Bridge have been forced to turn back because of the condition of the road. It is dangerous to those who attempt to travel over it.\(^6\)

Commissioner Owens forwarded the letter to Coconino County, and George A. Fleming, clerk of the County Board of Supervisors replied, "... this is an Indian Reservation road, ... and we are prohibited by law from spending any moneys whatsoever on any but county roads..."\(^7\) In fact, within a decade of its construction by the Richardsons, the road became the joint responsibility of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Navajo Tribe, and that is the status it retains to this day.

In late 1926, S. I. and Susie Richardson turned over their share of Rainbow Lodge to Hubert and moved down the road to establish Inscription House Trading Post on Red Mesa. Stanton Borum, a partner and employee of the Richardsons, and at the time manager of the trading post at Cameron, took over management of the lodge and quickly hired Bill and Katherine Wilson to run the day-to-day operations. Bill Wilson was a brother of Mabel Wilson Richardson, Hubert’s wife, so, true to the Richardsons’ custom, management stayed within the family. Katherine had worked as a librarian in Michigan.
before coming out to Arizona and moving to Navajo Mountain with her husband. The Wilsons were to become near-permanent fixtures at the lodge, remaining there twenty-six years. It cannot have been an easy life for this midwestern couple, but it must have been an agreeable one. Everyone who wrote about them testified as to their warmth and gracious hospitality. For many years, Bill served as chief guide and wrangler, while Katherine cooked for the guests and oversaw the trading post.

At the beginning of the Wilsons’ tenure at Rainbow Lodge it cost $20 per person for the overnight trip to the bridge. An additional day at Echo Camp to accommodate a hike down to the Colorado River could be had for $10. By 1938 the overnight trip cost $30 per person, and by the outbreak of World War II it was up to $50. A trip to circumnavigate Navajo Mountain, then a five-day excursion, could be had for $125 per person, and automobile transportation from Flagstaff cost $100 per car for the round trip. While this was a lot of money for the time, it was probably considerably less than what John Wetherill had to charge for the trip from Kayenta and certainly less than what river runners were later to charge for taking guests down the San Juan and Colorado.

During the war, gas rationing and a scarcity of rubber kept most people off the highways and close to home, so, predictably, visitation to Rainbow Bridge virtually disappeared. In fact, the Park Service estimates that only fifteen people visited the bridge in 1943. The Wilsons moved temporarily to Tuzigoot National Monument, in Arizona’s Verde Valley, where...
Bill Wilson found employment as a park ranger. Then in 1946 the following announcement appeared in the local Flagstaff newspaper:

A recent announcement from Phoenix states that Barry Goldwater will be co-partner with Mr. and Mrs. William Wilson in the operation of Rainbow Lodge. Mr. Goldwater left Phoenix last Saturday to go to the lodge to prepare it for the first opening session it has had since 1941. The lodge has seven cottages and a central ranch house and will operate from April 1 to November 1. 39

This occurred when Barry was barely thirty-five years old and three years before he was first elected to public office as a member of the Phoenix City Council. He had visited Rainbow Bridge in July, 1940 during a river trip with Norman Nevills, had once crashed his airplane into the side of Navajo Mountain, and since the early 1930s had owned a half-interest in the lodge in partnership with Hubert Richardson. 40 In fact, when he started employment with Goldwater’s as a clerk, his first supervisor was Sam Wilson, a cousin of Bill Wilson. Aside from these incidental connections, the plain truth is, of course, that Barry Goldwater bought out the Richardsons because he was simply in love with the country and its Indian inhabitants and wanted to keep his hand in the area any way he could. He constructed an airstrip nearby with a two-thousand-foot runway so he could fly up any time he wanted. He and his first wife, Peggy, spent their fifteenth wedding anniversary (September 22, 1949) on the summit of Navajo Mountain and, in Barry’s own words, “damn near froze to death.” 41 He states, “I was interested in acquiring the Lodge because it had the rights to carry people to the Rainbow Bridge, and that we did.” 42

Following the end of the war and the reopening of Rainbow Lodge, tourism to the great arch rebounded swiftly. In 1948, for example, nearly six hundred people visited the bridge, and by 1955 the numbers went over a thousand. The future for the Goldwater-Wilson operation certainly looked bright,
but it was not to last. On the evening of August 11, 1951, the beautiful lodge building caught fire and burned to the ground. Barry attributes the fire to a cowboy smoking in the men’s room, and he says that the building “really burned fast.” A stone structure that had recently been built to serve as a garage was pressed into service as a dining hall so that operation of the guide business could continue, but without the lodge much of the ambience and charm of the place disappeared.

Soon afterward, in May, 1952, Bill and Katherine Wilson finally retired and moved to Clarkdale, Arizona, thereby ending the partnership with Barry which had lasted nearly a decade. Myles Headrick, who had operated the trading post at Rainbow Lodge since Barry bought out the Richardsons, became the new partner. Merritt and Nona Holloway were hired to replaced the Wilsons, and it was announced at the same time that a new lodge building would be constructed and put into service by 1953. For a while it looked as if the old days were being brought back, but it was destined never to happen. As Barry Goldwater succinctly put it, “I was not able to rebuild the lodge because I did not have the money; it would have taken everything I had, and more.”

The operation continued to limp along for another dozen years, but in 1965 Barry and Myles dissolved their partnership and the Rainbow Bridge and Hotel Company ceased to be. The rising waters of Lake Powell were making the trip to the bridge a simple three-hour motorboat ride, and there seemed to be little future in the kind of rugged wilderness
adventure that Goldwater’s operation was offering. Besides, Goldwater, the Wilsons, and Headrick all learned the same lesson the Richardsons had learned many years before: it was simply too expensive to run a guide business from Navajo Mountain and still turn a profit. As Barry Goldwater later recalled, “... the best I did in that enterprise was to lose only four-hundred dollars one year.”

Today almost nothing exists to remind the visitor of what once was a hospitable and bustling operation. The local Navajos removed all the roof timbers for fuel, and the tribe later capped Willow Springs and diverted the flow to a tank which stands south and west of the old lodge site. The scene there today is one of utter loneliness and desolation.

During most of the years that the Richardsons and the Goldwaters were operating their lodge and guide service from Willow Springs, there was a smaller but competing operation up the road just over the Utah line. About the time that Rainbow Lodge and the trail over Redbud Pass were being completed and brought into operation, John Wetherill informed the Park Service of his intention to build a camp for tourists on the south slope of Navajo Mountain at a water source known as War God Spring. His son, Ben, actually started work on it, but the idea didn’t pan out. However, within a few years Ben Wetherill was operating a new trading post tucked into the side of Navajo Mountain a few miles north and east of Haystack Rock. Hoffman Birney found him, his wife, Merle, and their two young children there in 1928 at the conclusion of his epic 7,250-mile automobile journey around the West. The Navajos called the place Teas-ya-toh (Cottonwood Water), but it was later known simply as Navajo Mountain Trading Post. John Wetherill, Ventress C. (Vent) Wade, served as wrangler and guide to Birney’s expedition, which ended up taking six days round trip. Incidentally, on the way in they met a party of three tourists plus a Navajo guide from Rainbow Lodge obviously doing the whole circuit around Navajo Mountain.

Ben’s venture into trading and tourism at Navajo Mountain actually proved to be moderately successful, and in 1932 he sold the operation to the Dunn family. One of the daughters, Madeline Dunn Cameron, and her husband, Ralph, operated the post for many years until she retired to Oklahoma at the age of seventy-one. The Camerons were still there in 1957 when Ralph Gray of the National Geographic Society arrived for the second leg of a three-part exploration (river, horseback, and air) of the Rainbow Bridge country. Gray and his party took a Dunn-sponsored horseback trip to the bridge, and he became the 10,741st entry in the register still maintained by the Park Service at the base of the bridge.

By the mid-1960s, with the waters of Lake Powell rising gradually up Bridge Creek, the golden age of land-based tourism to Rainbow Bridge was definitely at an end. The last vestige of that time, Navajo Mountain Trading Post, with its store and gas station, closed around 1990. Therefore, as of this writing there are no longer any commercial facilities on the road to Navajo Mountain north of Inscription House and, of course, no one offering regularly scheduled horseback trips to the bridge. It is still possible to arrange a vehicle shuttle and/or transportation to the trailheads through the Navajo Mountain Chapter House, and Ken Sleight of Pack Creek Ranch in Moab or his son, Mark, of St. George, Utah, will still arrange an expedition to the bridge by request. For the most part, however, if you travel the old trails today it will be with a pack on your back and sturdy boots on your feet.

The overland routes to Rainbow Bridge, even with the amenities provided by the guided tours on horseback, led through some of the most wild and rugged country in the lower forty-eight, and the trip could be hot, uncomfortable, and a grueling test of endurance, even for one in decent physical condition. This led some enterprising souls to ask the question, “Why not the river?” After all, it was a short six-mile hike from the Colorado River through a shaded canyon with ample water, and the river through Glen Canyon presented few problems sufficient to challenge even a novice boatman.

There were, however, two difficulties which for many years prevented use of the river as a major tourist route to Rainbow Bridge. First, there was the matter of access. There were really only two points where the river in Glen Canyon could be reached by a vehicle: Hite at the mouth of White Canyon, and Halls Crossing at the mouth of Halls Creek. Neither of these was approached by anything except the most primitive of roads, and so the prospect of hauling boats of sufficient size to carry paying passengers along these rutted desert tracks was enough to discourage
anyone who valued his pickup truck. Actually, the river was easily accessible at two points further upstream. One was at Moab on the Colorado and the other on the Green at Green River, Utah, but between either of these sites and Glen Canyon lay the second obstacle: a frothing maelstrom of rocks, rapids, whirlpools, and boat-trapping eddies known as Cataract Canyon. No one in his right mind would even consider trying to row dudes through what is still one of the most dangerous stretches of white water in the country. Hence, for decades after its discovery, Rainbow Bridge was only infrequently visited from the river.

Probably the first traverse of the Colorado River and its canyons undertaken purely for pleasure and adventure was made by Julius Stone in 1909. Stone, a millionaire industrialist from Columbus, Ohio, had been one of the financial backers of Robert Brewster Stanton and his gold dredge experiment and had floated a short stretch of the river in Glen Canyon with Nathaniel Galloway in 1899. Since then he had toyed with the idea of recreating the entire Powell Expedition, even going so far as to visit the Major in his Washington, D.C., office. Powell gave him absolutely no encouragement, but determined to fulfill his dream, Stone hired Galloway to lead the trip and even brought him to Ohio to construct the boats. On Sunday, September 12, 1909, ten men in four boats set off from Green River, Wyoming. They were on the river for five weeks, arriving at Needles, California, on November 19, 1909. In his book describing the trip, Stone seems to imply that he knew about the newly discovered Rainbow Bridge but had no way of locating it from the river.

Close behind Stone and Galloway were the Kolb brothers, Ellsworth and Emery, who put in at the traditional spot in Wyoming on September 10, 1911, using boats of the Galloway design. These two adventurers had come out west from Pittsburgh in 1902 and set up a photography business on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. Their motivation for going on the river was the same as Stone’s: adventure and photography. They had a rough idea of where the bridge was located and were determined to be the first to hike to it from a river trip. Ellsworth describes their search for the elusive “Bridge Canyon”:

We had directions describing the canyon in which the Bridge was located, our informant surmising that it was thirty miles below the San Juan. We thought it must be less than that, for the river was very direct at this place . . . we began to look for it about twelve miles below camp. But mile after mile went by without any sign of the landmarks . . . Then the river, which had circled the northern side of the peak [Navajo Mountain], turned directly away from it, and we knew that we had missed the bridge. At no point on the trip had we met with a disappointment to equal that . . .

From the Kolbs’ description it seems obvious they had been camped on the beach at the mouth of Aztec Creek the night before but had no idea where they were. Then, too, the information on mileage which they had been given was grossly inaccurate; the San Juan joins the Colorado in Glen Canyon at mile 76, while Aztec Creek enters at mile 68.6, a difference of only 7.4 miles. Hence, the Kolb brothers didn’t even begin to look for the correct canyon till they were well past it. Of course, these two did eventually get to see the bridge; they traveled to it overland with John Wetherill and then hiked up from the river on several subsequent boat trips.

Part of the problem was that without a map, which didn’t exist at that time, the mouth of Aztec Creek was not that easy to locate. Aerial photographs taken before the dam show that the walls at the mouth of Forbidding Canyon were low and uneven on the south side of the Colorado, thereby masking the presence of the side drainage. The little stream itself flowed into the Colorado on the upstream side of a massive bar of sand and gravel and was also easy to miss. Hence, it was probably not until October 15, 1921, when the combined Trimble and Hough survey parties of the U.S.G.S. hiked up Aztec and Bridge Creeks, that Rainbow Bridge was first visited from the river.

The problem of how to get tourists on waterborne trips to the bridge was solved by a man whose name will be forever associated with the Colorado River, Norman Nevills of Mexican Hat, Utah. It was he who first demonstrated that it was both practical and profitable to haul tourists down the San Juan and Colorado Rivers and even through the Grand Canyon itself. The Nevillses came out to Utah in 1921 when William E. (Billy) Nevills got the idea that the San Juan country would be a good place to look for oil. He left his wife, Mae, and his thirteen-year-old son, Norm, in California, sunk what was left of the family fortune into a lot of dry holes, and then, just...
for fun, ran the San Juan River in a ten-foot open boat. In the meantime, Norman grew up in California, spent two years at the College of the Pacific in Stockton, and then, in 1927, came out to Mexican Hat to join his folks, who were by then running a lodge and guide service for tourists.57

In 1933 he married the love of his life, Doris Drown, whom he met at a dance in Monticello, Utah, and together they planned a honeymoon trip down the San Juan River. Norm built the boat himself from a water trough and an old outhouse, and in March, 1934, the happy couple set sail from Mexican Hat toward Copper Canyon, sixty-seven miles downstream. From that point on, Norman Nevills was hooked on rivers. He experimented with boat designs until he had one that he felt was large enough to carry tourists and gear while at the same time agile enough to take on white water. The canyons of the San Juan were no Glen Canyon—there were rapids, some of them pretty mean, and if he hoped to haul people safely down the river the boats had to be just right.

The design he settled on was a variation on one his father had conceived as a way to get through the massive rapids on the Yukon River in Alaska. They were shaped like old-fashioned flatirons, weighed six hundred pounds each, and were sixteen feet long. Nevills called them “cataract boats,” and with them he established a new standard for white water boating on southwestern rivers.58

In March of 1936 he was contacted by three professors from Stanford University inquiring about the possibility of a float trip from Mexican Hat to Lees Ferry. The three agreed to provide the food plus transportation back to Mexican Hat for Norm and his boats, and so, that very same month, Norm Nevills escorted his first paying customers down the San Juan and into Glen Canyon. On the sixth day he took his party to fabulous Rainbow Bridge and emerged a few days later at Lees Ferry tired and hungry but elated at the possibilities the expedition had opened up. Later that year, in September, he escorted the Van Eaton party on the same route. These two trips convinced him of the feasibility of turning his passion for the river into a successful commercial venture.59 For this, however, he needed some publicity plus a good safety record. Both came from what in retrospect seems the most unlikely of sources.

In 1937 a University of Michigan botanist, Elzada Clover, wandered by Mexican Hat asking Norm’s advice about collecting cacti, her specialty. Using every bit of charm he could muster, he convinced the somewhat naïve Elzada that a float trip through the Grand Canyon was just what she was looking for. Accordingly, on June 20, 1938, three boats, the Botany, the Mexican Hat, and the WEN, pushed off from Green River, Utah, and headed down-canyon. Elzada had persuaded her lab assistant, Lois Jotter, to come along for female companionship, and these two became the first women to successfully challenge the rapids in Cataract and Grand Canyons. On July 5 the party visited Rainbow Bridge, which Elzada described as “a breathtaking thing.”60

The journey was not without incident, but on August 1 they emerged onto Lake Mead with barely a scratch amongst them. The trip was awash in publicity, and because of it Norm Nevills was able to demonstrate not only his skill as a boatman but also his capacity for taking paying customers safely on what had heretofore been considered the most dangerous of endeavors. From then on his river business had no trouble attracting customers, and he was able to earn a comfortable living from it. He would normally run several San Juan trips and one Grand Canyon expedition each year, charging his customers fifty dollars per day for the privilege of working their tails off making the trip a success. His reputation for unrivaled skill at negotiating the rapids of Grand Canyon was such that at his death the Park Service considered banning future river trips for lack of a suitable boatman.

The typical Nevills Expedition from Mexican Hat to Lees Ferry was about seven or eight days in length, with Rainbow Bridge reached on the fifth or sixth day. Camp was made on the broad beach at the mouth of Forbidding Canyon, which was usually a comfortable oasis of grass and wildflowers. The six-mile hike to Rainbow Bridge was a welcome change from days of sitting in a boat, and Nevills’s passengers were nearly unanimous in their praise of the stone rainbow (plate 8). One wrote in his diary, “Dull would be the soul who could pass by a sight so moving in its majesty.”61 There Nevills’s passengers often met horseback and hiking parties who had come via the difficult overland routes from Navajo Mountain, virtually the only place during the entire river excursion where they were likely to meet other non-Indians. These encounters generated even more publicity and acceptance for the method of reaching Rainbow Bridge via the river.
Norm Nevills and his boat, the WEN, at Bright Angel Creek, Grand Canyon, 1938.
Sadly, Norm and Doris Nevills were both killed when their small plane, the *Cherry II*, crashed on take-off from Mexican Hat on September 19, 1949. For the river trade, however, their deaths were not an ending but a beginning. The business they founded was taken over by Frank Wright and Jim Riggs, who renamed it Mexican Hat Expeditions and continued plying the San Juan and Glen Canyon for several decades thereafter.\(^5\) Thanks to Norman Nevills, who showed the way, river running as a preferred method of seeing the canyon country was eventually to explode to an extent that even this enthusiastic visionary could not have imagined.

For many years the San Juan was the preferred river gateway into lower Glen Canyon and Rainbow Bridge simply because the road connecting Lees Ferry, the take-out point, and Mexican Hat, the put-in location, was available and decently maintained. It was far from ideal from a tourist standpoint, however, because the river highway down which the boats were forced to travel was filled with rocks, rapids, and mysterious “sand waves.” These required skilled boatmen and specially constructed craft to negotiate safely, thereby making for a thrilling but expensive run. Upper Glen Canyon, by contrast, was a placid stream with no rocks or rapids to speak of and which could be done by just about anyone with any kind of boat. The problem was the lack of any suitable road for hauling boats from Lees Ferry back up to some put-in point on the Colorado River below Cataract Canyon. That problem was solved in 1946 when the Utah Highway Department and the counties of Wayne and San Juan finally completed a graded road from Hanksville on the west to Blanding on the east. The Colorado River at Hite was crossed by means of a crude ferry constructed and operated by Arthur L. Chaffin, who had been ranching and farming at Hite since 1932. The road was dedicated by Governor Herbert B. Maw and a slew of county and local dignitaries on September 17, 1946.\(^6\) The new highway eventually passed into the state system as U95, and it remained a dirt track, rough but usually passable, until it was paved about 1965.\(^7\) With the completion of this road it became practical to launch boats at the head of Glen Canyon and do river trips on the Colorado with ease all the way to Lees Ferry.

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One of the first to take commercial advantage of this new opportunity was a young man by the name of Ken Sleight. A native of Paris, Idaho, Ken studied geology at the University of Utah from 1947 to 1951 and then found himself in Korea as a member of the U.S. Army from 1951 to 1953. When the military was through with him, Ken came back to Utah and decided to become a wilderness outfitter.\(^8\) Using rubber rafts left over from the last two wars, he ran Glen Canyon from April through September and did pack trips out of Escalante into the southern Utah desert before and after. He was able to charge a fairly minimal amount per person, so many of his customers were Scout troops eager to exchange the hardship of consuming sandy hot dogs and canned beans for the privilege of dousing each other with buckets of river water a dozen times a day. While his charges were busy cavorting in the river, Ken explored Glen Canyon, one side drainage at a time. Each trip he sought out one section of the canyon in detail, poking into new slits in the sandstone and climbing old cowboy and Indian trails till finally Ken Sleight became an expert on the hidden beauties of Glen Canyon. On every trip Rainbow Bridge was on the itinerary, and he usually included a hike to the bridge's top via the old Wetherill route. He therefore had both a spiritual and economic stake in what happened to Rainbow Bridge, a stake which was to serve conservationists in good stead later on.

From an outfitter's point of view the necessity of hauling boats, equipment, and personnel from the take-out point back upriver to the starting point was a major inconvenience and expense. The roads, though regularly maintained, were dirt, usually rough, and quite likely to wash out during violent summer thunderstorms. Norm Nevills constantly decried the beating his boats and trailers took on the road from Lees Ferry to Mexican Hat, and Ken Sleight was known to break truck axles on the road down North Wash between Hanksville and Hite. This problem could be avoided by simply staying on the river in both directions. This would require motors, of course, because even though the Colorado River in Glen Canyon was a sluggish stream, no man could row against its current all day. There was only one person who ever tried to exploit the commercial possibilities of running tourists up the Colorado to Rainbow Bridge, and that was a Four Corners country native by the name of Art Greene.

Art's family ran sheep in the high desert country around Aztec, New Mexico, at the turn of the
Figure 40: Ken Sleight, one of the premier river runners and tourist guides in Glen Canyon.
century and used a boat to haul livestock and equipment across the San Juan River. Art was known on occasion to use that boat to take tourists on fishing trips downstream past Farmington and Shiprock for five dollars a ride, and that served as his introduction to the guide business. As a young cowboy, Art had been among the first dozen or so people to see Rainbow Bridge back in 1910, and so when he and his wife, Ethel, found themselves operating a motel, café, and gas station at Marble Canyon in 1943 he got the idea of supplementing their income by taking tourists upriver to the bridge from Lees Ferry, a scant five miles away.

Actually, the idea of getting to the bridge by running the seventy miles upstream did not originate with Art Greene. On October 27, 1921, a party from Los Angeles came upriver to the bridge from Lees Ferry in a stern-wheel powerboat named Navajo.
the first (and perhaps the last) time that type of boat was used on the upper Colorado. The boats which floated the 1922 U.S.G.S. survey party led by Arthur R. Davis and E. C. LaRue were actually motored upstream from Lees Ferry to Halls Crossing, where the party finally boarded and began their trip downstream. In 1924 Louis R. Freeman wrote an article detailing an upriver trip to Rainbow Bridge using boats and motors supplied by a Los Angeles electrical company. Greene was perhaps familiar with at least some of these previous attempts at upriver navigation, and so he knew that such trips were certainly possible, and, perhaps, commercially feasible.

The biggest problem with going upriver was the river itself. During high water the current increased to the point that just moving upstream was difficult. During low water the propellers on the boat motors would shear off on submerged rocks or get fouled on sandbars. Then there was always the problem of the huge load of silt carried by the river in all seasons and which seemed to get into every opening, including the moving parts of engines. Art's first trips used a thirteen-foot boat with a standard twenty-two-horsepower outboard motor. If all went well, the round trip, including the hike to the bridge, was three days. If the current were strong or if mechanical problems developed the trip could be somewhat longer.

Early on he began experimenting with airboats, contraptions in which the propeller was actually mounted in the air several feet above the boat itself (plate 9). He got help with design problems from the Coast Guard, Fairchild Aircraft, and Seth Smith of Phoenix, and finally settled on a revolutionary inverted-V design for the hull and powered it with a 450-horsepower Pratt and Whitney engine. The powerful engine and the unique hull design nearly lifted the boat out of the water and made trips possible even when the river was at low flow. However, it made a terrific amount of noise and consumed about five hundred gallons of gas per trip. Hence, every third or forth trip a journey had to be made upriver to cache gasoline. In addition, the airboat required 100-octane fuel, so Art's trips didn't come cheap. A three- or four-day trip cost $250 per person, and in a good year about a hundred people would make the journey.

In 1957 the Bureau of Reclamation began construction of Glen Canyon Dam and cut off all access past the dam site from both upstream and downstream. Art Greene hated the dam, not just because of what it threatened to do to his livelihood but what it was certain to do to the Glen Canyon he loved. However, he was nothing if not pragmatic and resourceful. He negotiated a long-term lease with Arizona for 3,840 acres of state land at the canyon's edge upstream from the dam site, built a café, an airstrip, and eight stone cabins, and settled in for the long haul. He bulldozed a twenty-four-mile road from his settlement to the mouth of Kane Creek and continued running his motorized airboat trips upriver until the rising reservoir finally made his beloved Colorado into a lake. His final river trip to Rainbow Bridge took place in the fall of 1962 and included Governors George Dewey Clyde of Utah and Paul Fannin of Arizona as passengers.

With the demise of his airboat business Art Greene did not just dry up and blow away. His little camp on the lakeshore grew into what is today Wahweap Lodge and Marina, which he eventually sold to the Del Webb Corporation for a tidy sum. He then moved on to develop a trailer and vacation home resort called Greenehaven just up the road. He died in Phoenix in 1978.

By 1957 nearly twelve hundred people were making the trip to Rainbow Bridge annually, whether overland or by boat, and by the end of 1962 nearly twenty-four thousand people had seen what C. Gregory Crampton calls "the scenic lodestone of the Glen Canyon region." At the conclusion of his 1922 essay on the bridge, Zane Grey had written prophetically, "It was not for many eyes to see. The tourist, the leisurely traveler, the comfort loving motorist would never behold it. Only by toil, sweat, endurance and pain could any man ever look at Nonnezoshi. Grey was certainly correct concerning the "toil and sweat" necessary to get to the bridge, but this had not prevented tens of thousands of ordinary people from making the effort to stand at least once beneath the great vaulting semicircle of stone and, as a consequence, gain some measure of inspiration and pleasure from the experience.

However, tourism had scarcely changed Rainbow Bridge at all. Aside from the narrow, rocky trail which now passed under its east abutment and continued on down toward the Colorado River, things here were pretty much as they had always been. The great arch still looked out upon a canyon of incredible beauty in the heart of one of the last great unspoiled and unsettled areas in the country. In wet seasons a small stream would pass under it and happily gurgle...
its way down Bridge Canyon toward its junction with Aztec Creek. In winter the bridge would carry an occasional dusting of snow, and in summer the blazing sun would bake it and the surrounding country unmercifully. And then there was always the incessant wind, blasting sand against the bridge and facilitating the continuing act of its creation. Occasionally a man or two would pass by, gaze admiringly up at the stone rainbow, and then go, leaving the majestic solitude and loneliness of the place intact. This is the way it had always been and, as near as anyone could tell, the way it would always be. However, in boardrooms, conference halls, and legislative chambers in places very far away discussions were being held and decisions were being made which would alter the character of this country forever and which would threaten the very existence of Rainbow Bridge itself. The fate of the great arch was to become one with that of the big river, which flowed past only a few miles away.