

Dick Dorworth spent 50 years climbing, hiking and guiding in the Grand Canyon. He also is grateful for several private rafting trips down the Colorado River through the canyon, some of them in the company of children and grandchildren.

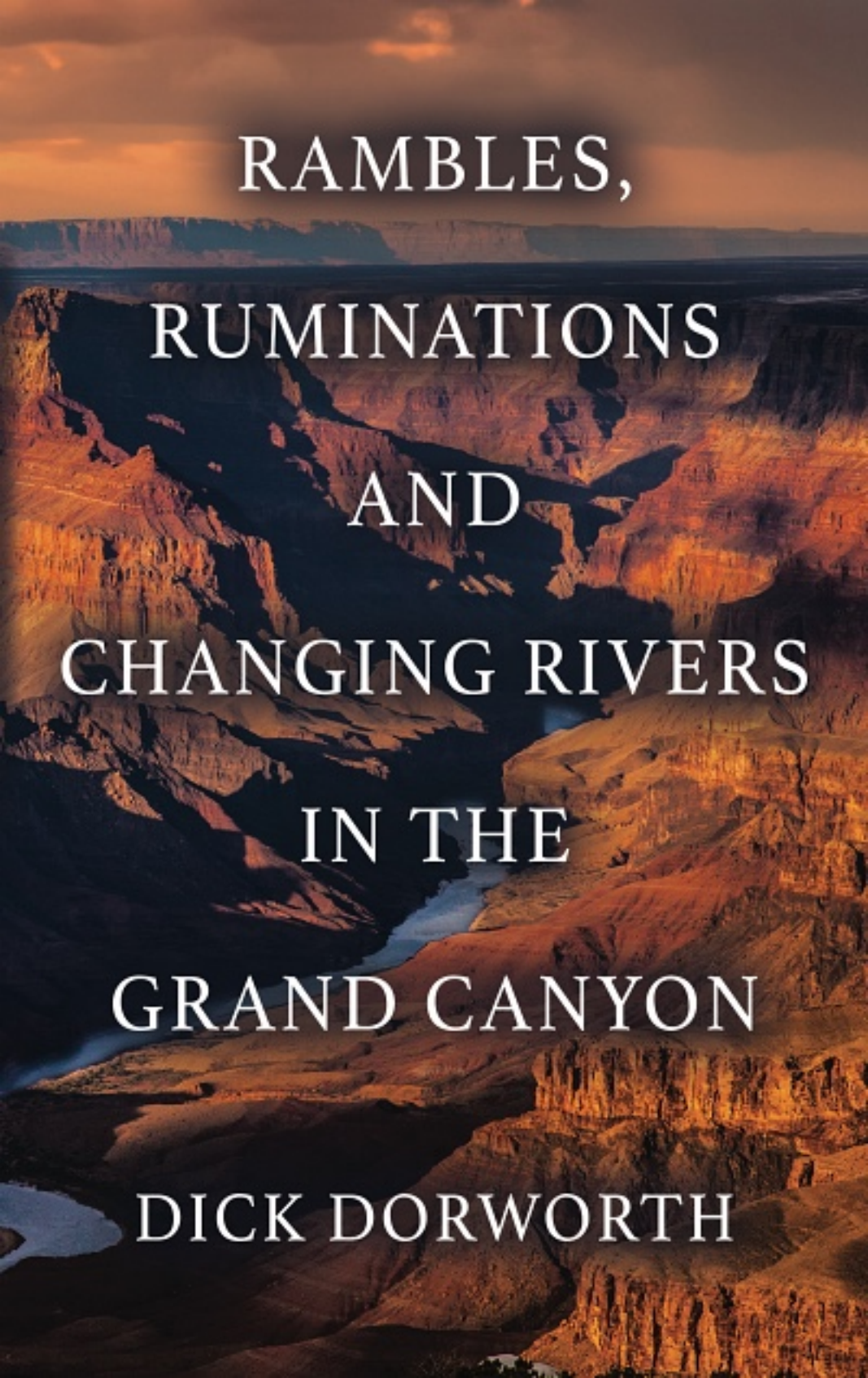
RAMBLES, RUMINATIONS AND CHANGING RIVERS IN THE GRAND CANYON

By Dick Dorworth

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that the energy of the river that formed the Grand Canyon lights the obscene neon lights of Las Vegas Casinos, each of which uses enough power to run 10,000 homes.

The South Rim had an unseasonal foot and a half of fresh snow which extended a thousand feet into the canyon. We spent a day there buying last minute items, organizing food into two ten-day bunches and getting hiking permits from the park service. Since 69,000 people went hiking in the canyon in 1975 and 100,000 in 1976 permits are getting harder to acquire. The Park Service has the arduous task of trying to keep the integrity of the Grand Canyon unsullied by the destructive carelessness of humanity. Ginger was making her 13th visit to the canyon and continually ran into old friends. Only her reputation as a seasoned canyon hiker and her popularity got us an extension from the normal 7 to 20 days of legal hiking. My name went on the permit much to Ginger's broad chagrin, but she was a good sport about it.

On April 18 I woke early at Yaki Point and got the *all-time* Easter experience, overshadowing even the time I went to Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris on Easter. The clouds were layered and when the morning sun started shining between them the universe became a slow-changing magical color light show of orange/red/yellow/ochre/pale grey above the backdrop of the most amazing canyon on Earth. I was up before the others taking photographs when, like in the movies of childhood, from somewhere in the canyon a chorus began singing "Hallelujah" as part of sunrise services. It was a high beginning to a hard day, almost enough to make me a Christian. We took the Kaibab Trail down to Phantom Ranch to leave a cache. The first few hundred yards were covered with snow and ice. Further down the colors, size and perspective of the canyon subtlety and continuously changed---greens became blues, browns turned to reds, blacks changed to mosaics of interminable patterns---in a paradise of visual stimulation, sensual excitement (you can *smell* the space)

and mental freedom (if you can't relax in the Grand Canyon you've got a problem). We passed some hikers and a large string of mules carrying people, a few of whom expressed wonder that we were actually walking down there on our own two feet. Ferde Groffe's music came to mind as well as the thought that people who have forgotten what their feet are for will build a freeway (or a tramway) to the bottom of the canyon if others let them.

After two and a half hours and 6,000 feet we crossed one of the suspension bridges over the muddy Colorado and arrive at Phantom Ranch. We stashed our cache and purchased coffee and sandwiches at the small, touristy coffee shop. Danny had seven blisters on his feet. Dora's knee was sore. Ginger was very happy to be in the canyon. I observed my mates carefully. Our hike would be quite demanding, especially if one of us got hurt and another had to get out in a hurry for help. After rest, food and drink and blister taping we set a rigorous pace back to the South Rim on the nine and a half mile Bright Angel Trail. I pushed them to their limits and, alas, a bit beyond. It was hot and muggy at the bottom but grew progressively colder and wetter as we gained altitude. Dozens of people flocked the trail: a young man in shorts and tennis shoes on some sort of training mission passed everyone; two very overweight girls suffering from exhaustion and despondency; a French couple dressed for a dinner party, complete with street shoes, high heels and overcoats; two teenage boys who forgot to bring water and were begging from every prospective soft touch; many other humans and a mule train. Mules, like humans, tend to urinate in the same places and the ammonia stench of mule urine is overwhelming in some sections where the small streams are undrinkable. People walk faster than fully loaded mules and we pass them and get back to the rim in a wet, miserable snow storm. The first glass of wine in the El Tovar Bar was like nectar from the fountain of youth.

The next day we drove to Fredonia on the North Rim, found a place to leave Dora's van and arranged for a ride to Sowat's Point the next day. At dawn on April 20 Merlin Bundy, a one-legged local rancher, drove us over 40 miles of deserted dirt, snow filled, muddy roads to Sowats Point in his 4-wheel drive pick up as if his wooden leg, the gas pedal and the floorboard were fused. Merlin dumped us, chatted a few minutes and roared off, leaving us with the canyon and 10 days of food. (Nearly 40 years later the Nevada rancher Bundy family became internationally infamous.) We changed our original plan of following the trail to Jump Up Canyon in favor of an adventure into unknown ground down the rarely hiked Kwagunt Hollow, a small, beautiful canyon carved in red sandstone by millions of years of running water and blowing wind. Ginger had read in Buchalt's new book that it "would go" and he's likely the only other person to go down it.

The hiking was typical of the canyon----usually uphill or downhill, seldom on the flat----but my pack was very heavy and each step embedded my foot in the Earth. We saw some horses and a mule we thought were wild but later learned had been put out to graze. Just after lunch I had a disturbing experience: Dora was walking first, me second about a minute behind. I stepped off a small ledge when I heard an unforgettable sound familiar from a Nevada childhood----the warning rattle of a rattlesnake about to strike. I looked to the sound and about a foot from my left leg saw a coiled rattlesnake, bobbing, weaving and lining up to strike. Two things happened that I can relate but not completely explain. First, the image of that weaving snake was déjà vu at its most powerful; that snake and I have been in the *exact* place and relationship before. And, second, suddenly I was standing ten feet to the right, having jumped there in one leap without thinking about it, further than I can normally jump sideways without a pack. The snake scurried away before I could get a photo. Later, I tried jumping

sideways with my pack and could manage about 18 inches. We all have untapped powers glimpsed only in times of unexpected stress.

The further down Kwagunt the more bizarre and beautiful were the sandstone formations and the more fatigue slowed us. By early afternoon we were at the junction of Kwagut Hollow and Jump Up Canyon and Dora was limping badly from a knee that wasn't supporting her. If her knee went, getting her out would be a serious problem, so we camped at the junction. It had running drinkable water and a natural bathtub in the rock which we all used with great enjoyment, the first bath for any of us in 8 days.

Danny's feet were terribly blistered but he cooked the first of many exquisite camp dinners. I slept like one of the stones I lay upon.

The next morning we headed down Jump Up, a narrow boulder strewn gorge with vertical walls rising several hundred feet. One feels deep in the Earth and not in a good place for a flashflood. We encountered a mule skinner stocking a forthcoming Sierra Club trek. He told us his plan of leaving some caches and coming back down Jump Up to Kanab before going out. He left and we continued. By noon it was clear that Dora's knee wasn't going to make it. I wrapped it with an Ace bandage but by the time we reached Kanab Dora was crippled with Grand Canyon Knee, caused by walking downhill with a load on insufficiently conditioned leg muscles which causes the knee to accept more strain than it can bear (stand).

We waited at the junction for the mule skinner to return, resting, enjoying the scenery and looking at the defacing amateur carvings in the soft rock by other visitors. The man and the mules returned. He was Alan Malmquist, well known in the canyon and on this day not happy about packing Dora out on one of his mules, but he eventually agreed and we had a good and friendly talk before saying goodbye to them as they headed up.

Kanab is deeper and wider than Jump Up and the vertical walls rose 1500 feet above us. Kanab Creek was running but crossable at any point. We stepped from rock to rock in the creek for a couple miles until we found a suitable camp by the water. We were sad to lose Dora but happy to have stumbled on Alan, and we slept the night with deep fatigue and high spirits, accompanied by the stars and the night song of thousands of frogs. Another sound tapped at my sleep filled consciousness during the night, but I ignored it until morning when we discovered our situation had changed entirely. All that unseasonal snow on the rim was melting and Kanab Creek was a torrent of the muddiest water I'd ever seen, covering the entire canyon floor.

We moved to higher ground and considered our limited options. We had no idea how high the water might rise, but getting out of there as fast as possible seemed prudent. Climbing out was impossible and going back up Kanab unacceptable, so we each cut a stout walking stick, exchanged hiking boots for tennis shoes and headed downstream in crotch-deep water. Since we couldn't see where to place our feet on the uneven rocky stream-bed and the rushing water continually threatened to knock us down and a broken ankle was undesirable, we felt out each move like blind men and women in unfamiliar territory. For two days we proceeded at a snail's pace, stopping to check out several side canyons with clear waterfalls and green trees, each a unique jewel and needed respite from grinding work. After one particularly hard crossing I noticed a large cardboard box in a cave about 50 feet above the water. Curiosity prompted investigation which revealed the box to be filled with dynamite, which left me where I started--curious.

From my journal, April 23 1976: *"The glaciers made Yosemite and the rivers made the Grand Canyon and all its side canyons; but it's all done with water, the softest of substances. Gentleness and persistence always prevail."*

On the afternoon of the second day we reached the Colorado River. Its murky waters which continually create the canyon were crystal clear compared to Kanab, and we drank our fill straight from the river with no ill effects. We are humbled by the magnificent enormity of the Earth which sustains us. The next day we followed the Colorado upstream for several miles. Sharp talus. Miserable walking. My right boot came apart and I held it together with a leather thong. All of us were fit and able to push hard and delighted to be able to see where we were putting our feet, but I was troubled on two counts: Ginger's knowledge of the landscape, on which I had heavily relied, contained some serious flaws; and I had ceased to trust her judgment. This, naturally, introduced some interesting kinks into our guide/client relationship which found me responsible for the well being of the experienced Ginger in a land she felt she knew and I'd never seen. And we were all growing progressively alarmed about the high water. Part of our planned route went through Tapeats Narrows, a 6 foot wide 200 foot deep gorge which was the only passageway to where we wanted to go. What if it was filled with water?

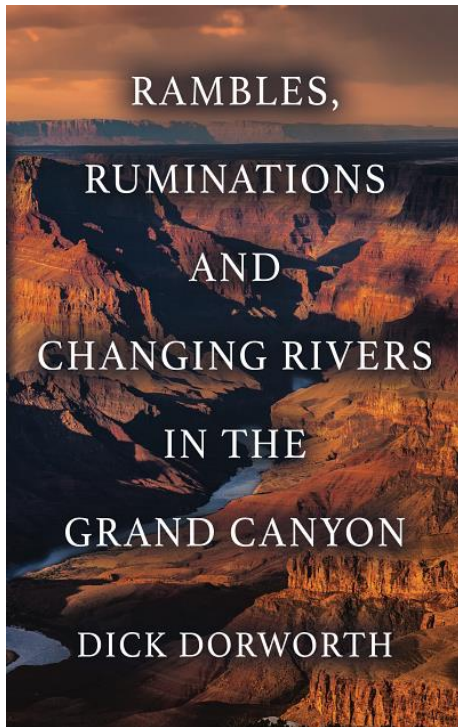
Deer Creek Falls was reached on the afternoon of the second day. It merits its reputation as a beautiful and special place of magic spirits. The falls were blasting out of the Tapeats sandstone 200 feet above an emerald pool surrounded by green tamarisk and cottonwood. Ginger said there was about five times more water coming over the falls than she'd even seen before. Two motor-driven commercial boats holding 25 people each landed across the river and set-up porta-pottys, tents, kitchens and all the civilized luxuries that large (and sometimes not so large) groups bring to the wilderness. The smell of their engines' exhaust caused us to hike up above the falls to Deer Creek Canyon, a lovely oasis full of trees and good camping sites which several hundred years before supported a tribe of people whose spirit can still be felt, even if their descendants are nowhere to be seen. I bathed in Deer Creek,

took photos, jotted in my journal, joked with my mates about what we were likely to encounter the next day at the Tapeats Narrows, ate another of Danny's epicurean camp meals and slept beneath the stars with dreams of suns and moons and stars and planets and galaxies moving around each other in dances of perfect harmony.

The next morning we were apprehensive and anxious and on the well worn trail early. We made excellent time to Thunder River Falls, two holes in the side of a thousand foot face gushing forth an incredible volume of water nurturing a garden of trees, watercress, ferns, grass and flowers running a mile down the side of a desert canyon to meet Tapeats Creek which was completely flooded. The whiteness of its rushing water was visible from far away. We went down anyway, and when we arrived Ginger noticed she had been walking for several hours with a cactus spine imbedded an inch into her calf. She was more anxious and distracted from the moment than we knew.

Well, it was over. The original idea could not be carried out. There was no way through the Tapeats Narrows. Ginger and I had some serious confrontations over some alternate routes she proposed. I rejected each of them as putting us too far from known water sources and escape routes from the canyon. It took a couple of days of contentious and unpleasant discussions with Ginger, but we finally decided to simply enjoy some further time hiking in the canyon instead of thrashing into the unknown attempting to make it into the history books. We hiked out and, to everyone's surprise and pleasure, met Dora who had not left as we had thought. We had a vehicle and discovered the road to the North Rim was open a day early and drove all the way to the Grand Canyon Lodge.

From my journal of May 2, 1976: "*Phantom Ranch....There is an enormous amount of snow.....Ranger Rick the ass-hole comes up, informs us that we can't sleep in the park that night as it was 'a mistake' that the 45 mile road was open a day early, that the road to Point Imperial above Nankoweap will be closed until June*



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