

RED CLIFFS COUNTRY

From the South Rim of the Canyon de Chelly we could see the apparently tiny White House Ruin, which once had about eighty rooms, far down the immense vertical slab of red sandstone cliff of the north side. From a viewpoint further east we looked down on the astonishing 800' high monolith of Spider Rock rising from the floor of the canyon and sacred to the Navajo people.



It is a long way from the white chalk cliffs and rolling downs of our area with its gentle, pearly light. Last September I was so fortunate as to visit the South-West of the U.S.A. with its amazingly varied landscapes and people, its warm, dry climate and strong, clear light.

Here we see the effects of coastal erosion; in southern Utah erosion takes very different forms and is, in part, the result

of the extreme dryness. Bryce Canyon is named after Ebenezer Bryce a Mormon cattle-rancher^{who} took the view that "it's a helluva place to lose a cow!" He had a point. The red, pink, orange, vermillion, cream, lavender rock appears sculpted into strange and varied shapes - ridges, arches, cliffs and thousand upon thousand of pinnacles or 'hoodoos'.



Like much of the S.W. this area is over 6000 feet and the canyon descends to 700 feet below the rim. Walking up and down through this wonderland was a remarkable experience, especially the ascent through a great ravine which has two 750-year-old Douglas firs at its lower end. As always in the States, the trails are superbly done.

BRYCE CANYON

Here we take our two thousand or so years of history almost for granted. There it can sometimes have a different meaning as in the 'historic' El Rancho Hotel in Gallup, New Mexico. This was built in 1937 by the brother of D.W. Griffith (the great movie-maker). Rooms were named after film-stars who used it as a base while filming in the locality; ours was 'James Cagney' which may have the original air-conditioning in the shape of a fan attached to the chandelier, and the original plumbing to judge by its gurgles. In the entrance lobby with its curving rustic staircases, draped with Navajo rugs, are internally-lit steer-horns and life-size models of an Indian brave and his squaw propped on a sofa. The whole effect is rather kitsch.

However, there are some remarkable ancient ruins. All over the S.W. are the remains of buildings of the Anasazi ('old ones' or 'old enemies' in Navajo) which, like the White House Ruin, were abandoned about

1300 A.D. for reasons which can only be guessed at. One of the most impressive is Cliff Palace at Mesa Verde in Colorado. Under a great overhang of rock, part-way down a cliff, are the substantial remains of a stone-built complex which had over two hundred rooms & up to four storeys.

The pueblos (villages) of the native Americans, with their flat-roofed adobe houses the colour of terracotta, are very different from ours. One of the most remarkable is Ácoma perched on top of its 365 ft high mesa. From choice the few members of the tribe who live there have no electricity or mains water. As we walked along the dusty streets with our guide people came out of their houses to offer their distinctive pottery for sale. The views over the high, arid plateau are marvellous. We could see

Enchanted Mesa inhabited until, so the story goes, a great storm washed away the only means of access while the people were working in the fields below. Only an old woman and a child were left, stranded, and they leapt to their deaths. We clambered down an ancient path from Ácoma with its well-placed and essential foot and hand-holds.



ENCHANTED MESA FROM ÁCOMA

A Hopi village called Walpi was fascinating. Unfortunately, though understandably, we were not allowed to take photos or sketch, even for a fee. In the adjacent village two women invited us in to watch them painting pottery with a long, thin leaf. In Taos Pueblo in New Mexico we saw men and women renewing their adobe (sundried brick) walls with liquid clay.

The mission churches of the Spanish are built in adobe. San Francisco d'Asis is famous for its sculptural, asymmetrical shape, much painted by artists, including Georgia O'Keeffe. The basic plan: nave, chancel with altar at the east end and, occasionally, transepts, is about the only resemblance to our Norman, Gothic and 19th century churches.



CHURCH OF SAN FRANCISCO D'ASIS, TAOS.

At its widest the Grand Canyon is 15 miles across, about two-thirds of the distance between Dover and Cap Gris Nez, and a mile deep. Its rocks are worn into an extraordinary variety of shapes by erosion & the Colorado.

Mexican food seems to make up a large part of the local cuisine. I was unadventurous there but did try blue Hopi pancakes. 'Short stack', two, and 'long stack', three pancakes were, along with English muffins, always on breakfast menus. I didn't try another American speciality, peanut butter and jelly (jam). We much enjoyed the rustic restaurant of Cliff Dwellers Lodge, at the foot of the well-named Vermillion Cliffs, with its offer of 'Fine Food Fixin's'.

Only recently have I realised that the mournful, evocative sound of the trains on the Santa Fe Railroad reminds me, a little, of the melancholy hooting of the fog-horn in Dover Harbour. But they evoke different sensations.

I am grateful to Phyllis Dobbins for firing my enthusiasm to visit the American South West. It made a marvellous contrast to White Cliffs Country.

Philomena Kennedy