

This 1882 map, produced by Clarence Dutton and showing fault lines in the "Plateau Province," is an early cartographic reference to the Waterpocket Fold (Dutton referred to it as Water Pocket Cañon).

# MODERN WANDERINGS ALONG THE WATERPOCKET FOLD

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*The Diary of Ralph Becker*

## *Preface*

The Waterpocket Fold stretches like a reptilian spine across over a hundred miles of broken desert lands along the western edge of the Colorado Plateau. This protruding geologic feature stands out in a region of impressive rock formations—heavenly spires, contorted hoodoos, canyon gorges, majestic plateaus. Geologist Clarence E. Dutton referred to it as “probably the grandest feature of the kind in the Plateau Country, so far as known, and perhaps the most typical.”<sup>1</sup> The fold, also sometimes called the “reef,” occupies a central location in perhaps what is the most remote corner of the state, making it an attractive plum for backcountry enthusiasts. Only the small towns of Torrey, Boulder, and Hanksville lie in its general proximity. For three weeks in April 1980 Ralph Becker hiked the length of it, for several weeks solo, the final week with a friend. Instead of following a defined route, he generally forged his own with the aid of topographic maps, sometimes losing his way but always reveling in the experience. By his own calculation, he walked 176.5 miles along the reef

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1 Qtd. in Miriam B. Murphy, *A History of Wayne County* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society and Wayne County Commission, 1999), 2–3.

and up and down side canyons—essentially the length of Capitol Reef National Park—recording his steps in a pocket journal.

In the tradition of western travel and wilderness adventure, Becker's travels were hardly unique, and his diary not necessarily more revealing or literary than those of others venturing out into the backcountry. But as a modern account of one man's experience in Utah wild lands and for its descriptive detail of the Waterpocket Fold and vicinity, it stands on its own. Lured by "the mystery and magic" of the canyon country, Becker set out "to walk a route never before travelled" and "to do something nobody has done." The fold, he figured, would be the perfect stage to test his "desire to experience solitariness and self-sufficiency" in the backcountry.<sup>2</sup> All the while he kept a diary, reflectively detailing his progress and observing the geologic wonders, cattle tracks, abandoned mining camp sites, and whatever else he stumbled across that caught his eye. Sometimes he lapsed into philosophical musings about the landscape. Mid-way through his trek, he wrote that his mind chattered "less and less about people," leading him to conclude that while humans are "thoroughly social animal[s]," they also crave "an individual non-human experience." In this journal, Becker offers one young man's experiences in Utah's wild country.

Becker explored the stretch of wild land bounded by the Aquarius Plateau to the west and the Henry Mountains to the east. This was terra incognita to people of European descent until well past the mid-nineteenth century. We have precious few early accounts. The earliest—and perhaps finest—description comes from Franklin Wooley, the adjutant of a military expedition led by Captain James Andrus. The party traveled north from Kanab and up the Paria River to the headwaters of the Escalante River to Potato Valley, then scaled the Aquarius Plateau for an unmistakable view of miles of broken country, including the prominent Waterpocket Fold: "Stretching away as far as the Eye can see a naked barren plain of red and white Sandstone crossed in all directions by

innumerable gorges . . . Occasional high buttes rising above the general level, the country gradually rising up to the ridges marking the 'breakers' or rocky bluffs of the larger streams. The Sun shining down on this vast red plain almost dazzled our eyes by the reflection as it was thrown back from the firey surface." After surveying the landscape, Wooley recorded, "we found no trails leading into nor across this country" and ventured no farther. Instead, Andrus led his party west through Grass Valley and eventually south to St. George.<sup>3</sup>

The river expeditions of John Wesley Powell would have caught the southern end of the Waterpocket Fold (while in the vicinity Powell mused: "One could almost imagine that the [sandstone] walls had been carved with a purpose, to represent giant architectural forms").<sup>4</sup> The first to penetrate its core was Powell's brother-in-law Almon Harris Thompson, on errand to retrieve a boat cached at the mouth of the Dirty Devil River. Departing from the small Mormon community of Kanab, he and "a small party" reached Potato Valley, then skirted the southern edge of the Aquarius Plateau and the western edge of Boulder Mountain. Here, Jack Hillers said they viewed "gulches and canons for miles . . . a dry country and almost impossible" to travel through. Following Pleasant Creek along an Indian trail over what Frederick S. Dellenbaugh, a young oarsman for the Powell expedition, called "strange country," the party encountered a band of Red Lake Ute. The Indians directed the men to a route through the Waterpocket Fold (so named for the "water pockets"—sandstone "pockets" that catch and hold water—they found there), probably in the vicinity of Notum, Utah. Thompson and Powell's men went on to scale the Henry Mountains and locate the cached boat. From there some of the men floated down the Colorado to Lonely Dell, John D. Lee's outpost on the Colorado near the Utah-Arizona border, while others

2 These quotes, taken from his "preface," are not included in the excerpts below. A copy of Becker's entire diary is housed at the library of Capitol Reef National Park's visitor's center in Fruita.

3 C. Gregory Crampton, ed., "Military Reconnaissance in Southern Utah, 1866," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 32 (Spring 1964): 156–57; James H. Knipmeyer, *Butch Cassidy Was Here: Historic Inscriptions of the Colorado Plateau* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2002), 36–38.

4 Powell diary, July 30, 1869, in John Wesley Powell, *Exploration of the Colorado River of the West and Its Tributaries* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1875), 70.

returned overland, essentially the way they had come.<sup>5</sup> Significantly, that expedition, in the words of the geologist Herbert E. Gregory, “recorded for the first time the salient features of the Aquarius Plateau, Circle Cliffs, Water Pocket Fold, and the Henry Mountains.”<sup>6</sup>

Becker descended from a broader tradition of backcountry travel and exploration going back to Wooley, Powell, and Thompson, but he had more in common with the youthful desert travelers of other folks. These included Everett Ruess, the famous artist and wanderer who mysteriously disappeared in Davis Gulch in late 1934, and his lesser-known contemporary, Clyde Kluckhohn, the author of two books describing his forays into the backcountry, including a delightful trek to the top of Wild Horse Mesa (the Kaiparowits Plateau).<sup>7</sup> But unlike Ruess and Kluckhohn’s sometimes romanticized accounts, Becker’s diary offers a modern perspective. Certainly, his reasons for venturing into the backcountry and hiking the entire length of the Waterpocket Fold were quite different from those of many who came before. Despite his unique route, he did not “discover” new territory or produce new geographic or scientific information. His was an engaging adventure in a region known at the time of the national park’s creation as “one of America’s least visited or known scenic areas.”<sup>8</sup> By the time of Becker’s trek, a major highway—U.S. 24—afforded passage through the reef and Lake

Powell and the marina at Bullfrog Basin nearly inundated the Rincon, the reef’s southernmost end. But for three weeks he satisfied his need to escape, albeit briefly, modern society, giving readers a glimpse into wilderness travel in the late twentieth century. It is also a record of the fold in its early days as a national park, prior to upgrades to the Burr Trail and heightened park visitation.

Presented here is an abridged transcript of Becker’s diary. The original is in Becker’s possession; editors of the *Utah Historical Quarterly* stumbled across a copy at the visitor’s center at Capitol Reef National Park in Fruita, not realizing that it was authored by the now mayor of Salt Lake City. As with most editing projects, completeness, accuracy, and significance were the guiding principles directing the editorial hand. We retained the author’s construction, spelling, and punctuation. Duplicated words, slips of the pen, and minor cross-outs were silently deleted. Where Becker added material above a line, we indicated it by employing <car-ets>. Crossed-out words are shown using the ~~strikeout~~ modification. When needed for clarity or readability, we inserted words in square [brackets] and added explanatory information and context in footnotes. Deleted material within entries is indicated with ellipses. Readers should note that Becker had the practice of writing in his journal about the previous day’s events.

5 Jack Hillers diary, June 11–18, 1872, in *Cleaving an Unknown World: The Powell Expeditions and the Scientific Exploration of the Colorado Plateau*, ed. Don D. Fowler (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press and Utah State Historical Society, 2012), 99–102. Dellenbaugh recounts his crossing of the Waterpocket in *The Romance of the Colorado River* (New York: Knickerbocker, 1902), 310–14.

6 Herbert E. Gregory, ed., “Journal of Stephen Vandiver Jones,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* XVI–XVII (1948–1949): 127n109.

7 See *On Desert Trails with Everett Ruess*, Commemorative Edition (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 2000); Kluckhohn, *To the Foot of the Rainbow: A Tale of Twenty-five Hundred Miles of Wandering on Horseback through the Southwest Enchanted Land* (1927; reprint, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992), and *Beyond the Rainbow* (Boston: Christopher, 1933).

8 U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Utah State Office, *Proposed Classification of Public Lands in the Waterpocket Fold–Escalante River Drainage Complex*, ca. 1970, in box 11, fd. 16, Book Coll 17, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

## The Diary

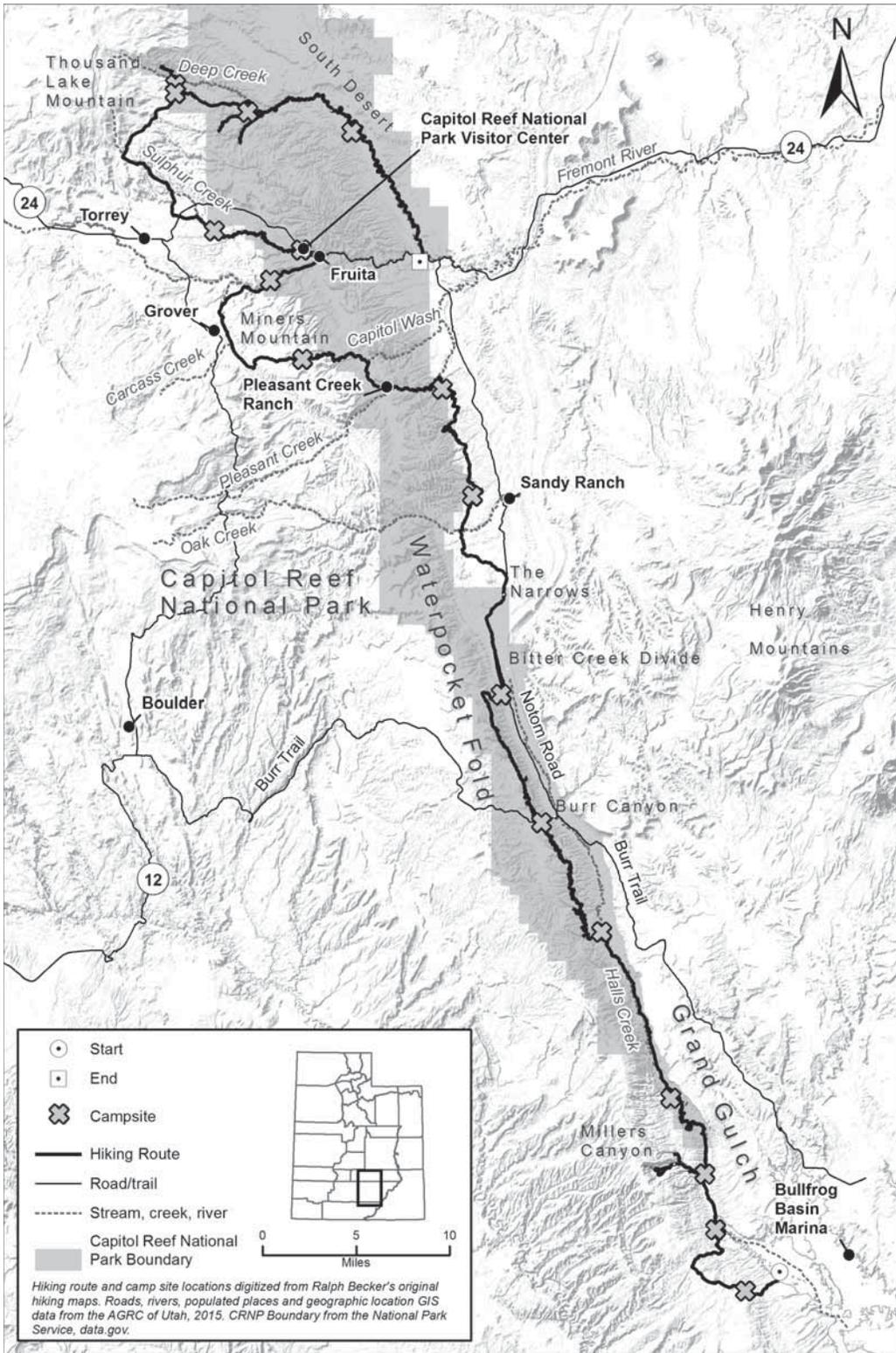
*Bullfrog Marina–Hall’s Creek* | Saturday, April 5, 1980

I’M HERE.

*Hall’s Creek* | Sunday, April 6

A.M – It took about 10 minutes yesterday to ride by speedboat from Bullfrog across the bay to Hall’s Creek, where I begin my trek. A friendly concrete pourer from Rifle, Colo. zoomed me into the edge of the Waterpocket Fold.

This is where the geologic and scenic wonder, the Waterpocket Fold, begins. Today it dives gently into Lake Powell and drowns—there is



Map of Ralph Becker's travels along the length of the Waterpocket Fold, from Halls Creek Bay on Lake Powell as far north as the foot of Thousand Lake Mountain. Becker estimated covering 176 miles during a three week period in April 1980.



*Panoramic photograph overlooking Halls Creek Bay with the Henry Mountains looming in the background.*

RALPH BECKER

no trace of it on the south side of the Colorado River (Lake Powell).<sup>9</sup> . . .

Relying on intuition that the clouds would dissipate after sundown, I passed up a south-wall overhang for a camping spot where I would have a clear view of the east-sunrise. A big waterpocket mostly filled <in> with sand Navaho sediment and covered with junipers, grasses, yuccas, and prickly pear provided filled my demands.

Scallions, mushrooms, carrots, bell peppers, and green beans supplemented Top Ramen beef-flavored noodles for my evening feast.

*Hall's Creek | Monday, April 7*

I completed a full day's hiking yesterday.

<sup>9</sup> The southern end of the fold, now partly inundated by Lake Powell, is actually the island in the center of the Rincon.

From my camp, a few hundred feet above Lake Powell I hiked straight up the Waterpocket Fold in a southeasterly direction to the ridge, almost 2000'. On top I was treated to spectacular views of Navajo Mt., the Straight Cliffs, sets of cliffs to the east extending many 10's of miles, and occasional views into the Escalante drainage and Stevens Canyon, and the Henry Mts. to the North.

After walking a few miles <north> along the ridge top, I decided to traverse back down the Fold to Hall's Creek. It took me most of the remainder of the day. Steep canyons continually sprang <down> up in my path. I would have to back-track, ridge walk, or follow the canyon bottom for awhile, only to begin again the sequence upon encountering an insurmountable drop. At one point I had to lower my pack about 8' in order to continue down a precipitous ridge. Learned—don't trust the topographic maps on the fold. Hundreds of canyons appear



*Water pockets similar to this one give the reef its name. The namesake came from Almon Harris Thompson's 1872 party, which camped near "two water pockets" while trying to find passage through the geologic formation.*

—  
RALPH BECKER

and end without ever being accounted for in the maps.

The Navajo sandstone, which makes up this lower portion of the Fold, offers endless variety.<sup>10</sup> Water pockets are everywhere at this time of year. Some are 30'–40' in diameter and the depths are seemingly fathomless. Large frogs croak and dive for shelter upon my arrival. . . .

Hard driving winds blew relentlessly, at times

throwing me off-balance. A stream of clouds whipped by from the west and showers were visible throughout the day on the Henry's. Sand worked its way into everything—my lunch, camera, water, all by my belongings, ears and eyes.

As the day wore on the wind began to shift northward, with gusts on occasion from the northwest. A large cloud appeared shortly before sundown. Although I believed the front was passing, I played it safe and camped under a big cottonwood tree.<sup>11</sup>

*Miller's Creek | Tuesday, April 8*

The morning of April 7 brought crystal blue skies. After housekeeping and a quick snack of dried fruit and chocolate, I hurriedly threw on my pack to work out of me the morning chill.

The wind was relentless, driving hard, and cold from the north. I plowed through it for several miles up Hall's Creek to Miller's Canyon.<sup>12</sup> Tumbleweeds rushed madly at me, filled creek bottoms, and clung desperately to sage and rabbit brush. When I had to walk through a bramble of them, the tumbleweeds knawed at my legs and arms. I soon grew <so> weary enough to them that I would walk well out of a normal route to avoid their barbs. Finally, I resorted to boulder hopping as I crisscrossed Hall's Creek.

At one point during the trek across a bench I encountered <a> fresh pool of blood. There was no other trace around. A bird or ground squirrel had no doubt met its demise. . . .

In one creek bottom I was surprised to see downed cottonwood trees. They appeared to be carved towards the center like a beaver's work.—possible?

I finally reached Miller's Creek. Although almost all of the gulches had water at this time of year, Miller's Creek distinguished itself

10 In 1922 John Widtsoe, while traveling by wagon to the mouth of Hall's Creek as part of a party of men working on what became the Colorado River Compact, had a similar reaction to the landscape, finding "magnificent scenery, and a remarkable variety of forms." See A. R. Mortensen, ed., "A Journal of John A. Widtsoe; Colorado River Party, September 3–19, 1922," *Utah Historical Quarterly* XXII (1955): 195–231 (qt. on 203).

11 Despite Becker's belief that he "played it safe," camping under a cottonwood is never a good idea, especially during a violent storm, because of the danger of falling limbs.

12 This is the first of "over two dozen narrow canyons and their tributaries cutting through the tilted strata and huge sandstone domes of the reef" between here and Pleasant Creek.

with a flow that almost matched Hall's Creek and <contained> a heavy outwash. I traversed a ledge of alluvium, abandoned my pack for a daypack and slipped my feet into jungle boots, the finest for wandering in and out of water and onto rocks. The light load on my feet, and shoulders, and hips was a welcome relief. . . .

Miller may have been a uranium miner.<sup>13</sup> I crossed an occasional board and <a> well-eroded and overgrown road. Near the head of the canyon I discovered his abandoned mining site—rusted cans (including some Becker beer cans), old catalogs and Life magazines (dated August, 1957), a rusted wood stove, some charred foundation and cracking rubber hose to the creek bottom marked the spot. He must have been a sturdy individualist and determined to eak out a fortune. With all of the chinle <exposed,> (though I didn't notice outcroppings of uranium-bearing shinarump), there must have been loads of hope in this canyon.<sup>14</sup>

I did cross several large pieces of petrified wood, always an exciting find. On the way out I took my first bath (my nose said thank you) and washed some socks. It was sunset by the time I left the canyon. I camped at the mouth in <a> plain circled by sage-covered hills. The wind had died down.

Coyotes wailed at dusk. <Mountain House freeze-dried> Beef stew and hot chocolate for dinner—delightful.

This morning I patched my shorts—for me an accomplishment if it holds. I'll for see if Hall's Creek narrows is passable this time of year today.

*Hall's Creek above the Narrows | Wednesday, April 9*

After repacking my backpack, I started north again in Hall's Creek. . . .

On the east side of Hall's Creek a cliff rises 800'–1100'. The wingate sandstone provides its foun-

ation. A layered chocolate brown siltstone makes up the largest vertical area (<Sumnerville> formation?). In this portion of the Creek there are only one or two ways out to the east, and they involve major scrambling efforts and careful route selection. The Waterpocket Fold provides the western side of the Creek. Gentle <red> hills of the carmel formation initiate the climb upwards. The navaho sandstone erupts in domes, cross-bedded slabs, and twisting canyons to the sky. Properly named, the USGS map called the canyon Grand Gulch.

Following cattle trails, I made good time to the Narrow[s].<sup>15</sup> A still, sunny morning with a cool breeze made the hiking easy. App[r]oximately two miles from Miller's Creek, I crossed into Capitol Reef National Park. Other than an occasional bo<u>ndary sign, one would not notice the transition.<sup>16</sup> Occasionally, I spot the old road to Baker Ranch and Hall's Crossing. Yet these two areas are managed by the Park Service very differently. In the recent Glen Canyon National Recreation Area Management Plan, Hall's Creek was not recommended for wilderness status.<sup>17</sup> Surely, there can be few areas as pristine or scenic in GCNRA (including lower Escalante). "Man's imprint" is essentially unnoticeable, and where there are some quaint reminders of man, e.g., the abandoned uranium

15 Grove Karl Gilbert, a nineteenth-century geologist, described the "narrows" as "a place where the creek turns from the open canyon of the shale and enters a dark cleft in the sandstone. He can follow the course of the water (on foot) and will be repaid for the wetting of his feet by the strange beauty of the defile. For nearly three miles he will thread his way through a gorge walled in by the smooth, curved faces of the massive sandstone, and so narrow and devious that it is gloomy for lack of sunlight; and then he will emerge once more into the open canyon." For Gilbert's report, see *Report on the Geology of the Henry Mountains*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880), 132.

16 Becker's journey began in the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, established in 1972. At this point, he crossed into the southernmost border of Capitol Reef.

17 This is a reference to the Bureau of Land Management's 1979 initial wilderness study inventory that identified more than 6.3 million acres statewide for more intensive review. Those lands on the inventory ultimately recognized as exhibiting wilderness "characteristics"—currently 3.2 million acres—are managed by the BLM as though they were designated wilderness until Congress acts to designate or delist them. See Jeffrey O. Durrant, *Struggle Over Utah's San Rafael Swell: Wilderness, National Conservation Areas, and National Monuments* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 44.

13 The identity of Miller is unknown.

14 Whoever made this camp was probably not unlike many other hopeful prospectors fanning out across the southeastern Utah in the 1950s. See Raye C. Ringholz, *Uranium Frenzy: Saga of the Nuclear West* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2002).

mining venture in Miller's Creek, they do not detract from the wilderness quality of the area. And if they did, the area is easily restorable with a couple of man days work.<sup>18</sup> Is the mineral potential of the area great? We need consistency in management here. The land borders a National Park.

*Lower Muley Twist Canyon | Thursday, April 10*

Yesterday I hiked the about 12 miles up Hall's Creek to the mouth of Muley Twist Canyon. At times it was arduous as the hot sun parched <me>. Even more difficult was passing <by> [-] the inviting little canyons that entered the base of the Fold and disappeared behind a corner. Only sweeping curves high in the walls of the fold revealed where they may have gone.

I basically followed cattle trails and the old Hall's Crossing road up the Creek.<sup>19</sup> This is winter grazing ground for the ranchers in Boulder.<sup>20</sup> When researching my master's thesis I came across a series of <newspaper> articles describing the fury of the town when Lyndon Johnson extended Capitol Reef National Monument from 29,000 acres to 250,000 acres (approximately today's size) in 1969 as one of the last acts of his Administration. The Boulder Town

18 Here Becker hits on a major point of conflict in debates over wilderness: the existence of abandoned cabins, mine tailings, roads, and stock ponds in wilderness areas. Although some wilderness opponents favor a definition of wilderness as "pristine," the framers of the Wilderness Act of 1964 did intend wilderness designation in areas with histories of human use and even habitation. In debates over passage of the Endangered American Wilderness Act of 1978, Congress explicitly rejected the idea of wilderness untouched by people. See Kevin Marsh, *Drawing Lines in the Forest: Creating Wilderness Areas in the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 3, 125.

19 Becker followed a historic road, labeled a "jeep trail" on topographical maps. First used by Mormon pioneers in 1881 as an alternative to the east-west crossing of the Colorado River at Hole-in-the-Rock, it served as an important transportation route until yet another route farther north at Hite Crossing replaced it. Cornelia Perkins, Marian Nielson, and Lenora Jones, *Saga of San Juan* (n.p.: San Juan County Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1957), 78.

20 Somewhat unusual among Mormon-settled towns, Boulder depended not on farming but on cattle ranching. The first ranchers arrived in the 1880s, grazing their cattle herds on public range lands free of government control. At summer's end, area ranchers commonly drove their cattle from Boulder Mountain east to the lower elevations.

Council, fearing they would lose their winter grazing territory and thus their ranching livelihood, renamed their town Johnson's Folly.<sup>21</sup> As I recall [in] the Park legislation of '71, grazing will be terminated for the rancher's after 1 more 10-year leasing period.<sup>22</sup>

The cattle represent an annoyance to most hikers. One cannot drink from their despoiled water, the vegetation is diminished (sometimes the landscape is almost denuded), and the smell of cow pies lingers in the air. On the whole though, I believe that permitting <regulated> grazing is one compromise backpackers should make. Grazing is an historic way of life in the West. If properly managed, the damage is minimal and reversable. And cattle's terrain is limited to relatively flat, vegetated areas. and By sticking to wilder country, cattle can to a large extent be avoided. However, in National Parks or other areas where preservation of the natural ecosystem must not be violated, grazing has to be eliminated, despite the burden on individual ranchers.<sup>23</sup> . . .

21 See *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 24, 1969. Aside from grazing, locals also worried about being "deprived" of "potentials in oil and minerals" with designation of the park. See Nethella Woolsey, "Escalante Chamber of Commerce Joins National Organization to Protest and Fight 'Land Grab,'" *Garfield County News*, February 27, 1969.

22 Becker added this handwritten note on the bottom of the page at a later date: "Congressional legislation extended the grazing in [Capitol Reef National Park] in 1982." This designation was through December 31, 1994, and later through the "lifetime" of permittees and their children "who were born before the establishment of the park." *Capitol Reef National Park - Utah: Final Environmental Impact Statement, General Management Plan, Development Concept Plan*, September 1998, 17-18, at <http://www.nps.gov/care/parkmgmt/upload/caregmp.pdf>.

In 1971, Congress abolished Capitol Reef National Monument and established Capitol Reef National Park, with enlarged boundaries. 85 Stat. 639.

23 At the time of Becker's writing, an environmental assessment on grazing phase out at Capitol Reef, reportedly drafted by Park Service, attributed "disappearance or severe depletion" of large game animals and other ecological impacts to grazing. In particular, the document mentioned grazing overuse near water holes in the Waterpocket Fold, near Fountain Tanks and Muley Twist Tanks. "Capitol Reef EA, Reservoir Maintenance and Grazing Phase Out," [ca. 1982], 10, 17, box 1, fd. 4, Series: Capitol Reef National Park, Record Group:National Parks, MSS 200, Utah Wilderness Association Records, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan.

At one point on the walk it looked like the fold may go through a major change. In the red slide area slabs of wingate began to push up on the west side of the creek and the purples and greys of the chinle formation were also exposed to the west with a significant slant paralleling the Fold. However, 2 miles further up canyon, the wingate and chinle had receded to their previous posture.

In the hottest part of the day after losing track of how far I had hiked, when hot dry and swearing at my foot, I discovered a little paradise. Hall's Creek had opened up into a broad valley and I was hiking on the west side. <I had not seen water for miles> There on my left side the edge of the fold in the navaho water glistened over the lip of a water pocket. I scrambled to the water took a refreshing bath, ate lunch, did some laundry, and at once was at peace with the world.

After looking at the map I surmised my spot—Muley Tanks. Muley Twist Canyon was less than a mile away. I stopped to look into a cavern flowered by chert chippings and an occasional pottery sherd (sp?). Vehicle tracks and boot marks were here <recently>. Were vehicles permitted? These guys must have been looking to pillage. Several “test holes” had been dug.<sup>24</sup> I wandered further up the little canyon to its head to be certain. I was not in Muley Twist. It was a delicate, finely sculpted canyon. At one point it was so narrow I had to chimney across a 15 foot pool. At its head was a large, round cavern with a deep, blue pool. Upon leaving I looked to the names carved and written on the cavern wall. Included among them was Moffitt <from Manti,

Ut.> of a USGS survey dated 1923.<sup>25</sup>

Last night I ate Mt. House Chili & Beans—not recommended.

*Burr Trail | Friday, April 11*

I reached the Burr Trail just before sunset and quickly found a suitable camping spot and my cache. Quite a feast last night—canned plums, tiny shrimp, chicken stew, and hot chocolate. This morning I have a can of strawberries, but I'm not sure my digestive tract will accept them.

I noticed last night some snow on the north facing slopes here. This morning it flurried and there is a cold wind. I have heard a couple of cars pass below on the Burr Trail—civilization.<sup>26</sup>

I have now completed the first of three parts of my trek. I easily could have spent my entire time to this point. Ideas have been seen for many future, shorter hikes.

*Upper Muley Twist Canyon | Saturday, April 12*

Yesterday was extraordinary.

It was too cold to spend a morning of leisure as I had originally intended. Snow flurries kept blowing into camp and the wind didn't permit me to get warm—even by the fire. Finally I resolved myself to pack up my week's gear and start up Upper Muley Twist Canyon.

While packing one huge gust of wind blew my sleeping bag, socks, poncho, and other assorted items into the fire. Frantically I pulled everything

In making the case against an extension of grazing privileges in the park, *Deseret News* reporter Joseph Bauman noted that of the eighteen grazing allotments in the park, only three were entirely within the park's borders. The others were both within and without the park. Jake Garn, the Utah senator who introduced a bill to extend those privileges, shot back, arguing that Capitol Reef's phase-out was “much more harsh than for other national parks” and that since “grazing takes place in the park during the winter months, . . . relatively few tourists ever see the cattle.” See Bauman, “New Grazing Rights Will Hurt Utah Park,” *Deseret News*, April 15–16, 1982, A5, and Garn, “Grazing Threat ‘Exaggerated,’” *Deseret News*, April 28, 1982; both in box 1, fd. 6, Series: Capitol Reef National Park, MSS 200.

24 This is a common method of archaeological looters. See Craig Childs, *Finders Keepers: A Tale of Archaeological Plunder and Obsession* (New York: Little, Brown, 2010).

25 This is likely Donald S. Moffitt (1904–1960), buried in the Manti Cemetery.

26 The Burr Trail offers the only motorized passage through the reef, other than Highway 24, following the course of the Fremont River and the old pioneer road through Capital Wash. From Boulder the road descends to the plateau in the shadow of the Circle Cliffs, enters Capitol Reef, and drops down the face of the Waterpocket Fold in a series of hairpin switchback turns. From there it runs south on the old Hall's Crossing road to Bullfrog Marina on Lake Powell. Though at the time of Becker's journey a little-used backcountry road, within a few years the Burr Trail gained national attention over plans to pave it. The section of the road up to the park's boundaries is paved; the other half, through the park, remains a gravel road. See Jedediah S. Rogers, *Roads in the Wilderness: Conflict in Canyon Country* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2013), 87–111.

out. Scratch one pair of socks and major damage to my sleeping bag around the hood. With some emergency repair tape, I halted the damage. My poncho-groundcloth will have to survive with some small holes. . . .

Upper Muley Twist Canyon is a fine work of art. Tremendous navaho sandstone fins rise steeply to the east, creating the backbone of the Waterpocket Fold. The kayenta sandstone, a pinkish and tan ledgy rock, begins making an appearance just under it. Wingate sandstone is becoming a dominant formation. It rises in great humpbacks and provides, for the most part, the western edge side of the Canyon. In the wingate, arches appear everywhere. Some are high up the walls, others are near the stream. They come in all sizes and shapes.

About 3 miles up canyon I follow a trail for a view of strike valley (Hall's Creek) and some lunch. The wind on top is so strong I must crouch sometimes. The view of the Henry Mts. and to the north (Capitol Reef itself) and south (Hall's Creek) is incomparable, however. Blowing snow and broken light provide an exceptional treat. . . .

From the head of Muley Twist Canyon I can see to the north a heavily vegetated red rock canyon. From here I must find a way down the Waterpocket Fold. It is not quite as steep and a route looks plausible to the south. Carefully, I wound my way down through the slabs of navaho sandstone <1200'> to a funnel at the bottom. Finding a water pocket I fill my water bag and find one last difficult cliff. I slide my water bag to the bottom where it bursts open like a water balloon. My pack followed (without similar results) and I gingerly shuffled and jumped to an awaiting pinyon pine. 50 yards downstream I found more water in the carmel formation, and filled my spare water bag and made camp.

#### *Rim of Sheets Gulch | Sunday, April 13*

I left camp yesterday morning and began the part of my walk along the base of the Waterpocket Fold to Pleasant Creek, about 3 days including distractions into some of the side canyons. The wind picked

The wind picked up again and blew cold from

the north. I hiked up to Bitter Creek Divide and then along the top of a shale ridge capped with Dakota Sandstone. The view from this ridge was magnificent in the morning light—Henry Mts. to the east, <rising> Waterpocket Fold to the West, and great navaho sandstone towers in front of me. I was in cattle country again—they jolted upon seeing me and were particularly playful with one another.

After paralleling the <Notom><sup>27</sup> Road for a couple of miles, I crossed its path and began making good time—hopefully good enough to get to the Coleman Canyons in time for a late afternoon hike. While hiking up the road one person stopped and asked me if I would like a ride. I told him I was trying to get some exercise.

The Notom Road here veers away from the Fold to skirt Cedar Mesa. As I walked further and further from the Fold I grew more and more disgusted with my “walking the road.” I was no longer at the base of the Waterpocket Fold—the spot I had come to <experience> hike. I left the Notom Road and began hiking back towards the Waterpocket Fold.

Soon I saw and felt why this area had been bypassed. I was constantly going up and down over 100+' high shale hills and sand dunes. This was drudgery—up and down over endless hills and in and out of countless gullies and washes. I would look up at the solid rock of the Fold and wish I had taken the high route, trying to pick my way across the top of the Fold.

I kept trudging along, telling myself I had not promised myself a picnic for 3 weeks and this was one of the unpleasant parts. At least I had a grandview view. By mid-day heavy clouds were rolling in again from the north. . . .

By the time I arrived at the confluence of the Creeks late in the afternoon, I realized it was too late to start a hike and get any further than the mouth of one of them. The clouds by this time looked ominous and I could see no effective cover from the wind or potential snow anywhere in these shale <and dune> hills. So I decided to push on and hopefully get far enough

<sup>27</sup> This is now known as the Notom Road Scenic Byway, a paved and gravel road connecting Highway 24 and the junction of the Burr Trail.

so I could enjoy a day hike tomorrow. I climbed up and over another hills and onto the flats of the Sandy Ranch<sup>28</sup> and dropped into Oak Creek Canyon. . . .

As I left Oak Creek and began making my way across the sands and <carmel> shales, disappointment over slow progress and difficult trudging left me. ~~Before my eyes,~~ The pastels took on a richness and depth of splendor I had failed to comprehend. Overwhelming feelings engulfed me. I seemed to feel nothing, yet everything, and for a time completely lost track of even my own presence. Slowly, a darting rabbit, a frigid burst of wind, and the rim of Sheets Gulch brought me out of the state.

Those moments were one of the rare <moments> times I've felt that way in my life.—a blissful, treasured period of time, and the only kind of religious experience I can say I've known.

Anticipating a cold night, I made camp as well out of the wind as I could and where I would be able to see sunrise over the Henry Mts. I ate a tasty dinner of Mt. House shrimp creole and climbed in my sleeping bag early in search of warmth.

#### *Burro Creek | Monday, April 14*

Spring arrived yesterday at the Waterpocket Fold. In immediate response some dainty white flowers opened up and others looked ready to burst.

As I prepared to leave camp, I kept waiting for that familiar cold wind to reappear with gusto. With only <a> light wind I left camp and made my way down the south side of Sheets Gulch to a place where the navaho had leveled out and started up towards 5 Mile Wash. Small canyons cut deeply through the soft shale of the carmel formation, but today I was prepared for them and could even enjoy my trek. I kept climbing higher and higher to avoid as many of the continuum of gullies and canyons as possible. Nevertheless, it was very slow going. At one stretch I walked through a dead pygmy forest—all of the older junipers and pinyons had died, leaving only their scraggy frames. Near the top of

another gray and reddish-orange hill I encountered a large field of grass—obviously the cattle hadn't discovered this one yet. The top layer of shale is a thin, hard, tan rock that fractures easily. When I would encounter a pile of this rock that had to be traversed, it sounded as though I was walking on broken shingles or china.

When I finally arrived at 5 mile Wash I was a little high on the canyon to traverse it. Navaho sandstone walls were still 40'–50' high. I followed the canyon rim down 100 yards or so and saw a little break I believed I could make it down through. After started down I realized that one spot was going to involve some tricky maneuvering. Following Nancy's Rule of Safety—if in doubt, don't—I backtracked, went down canyon another 100 yards or so and found an easier route.<sup>29</sup>

On the way into the canyon I observed a strange phenomenon. A flock of smallish, <or> medium-sized birds of about 30–40 came screeching and yelping down the canyon at lightning speed just above the far wall. Behind them were a few trailer birds. The first flock must have been warhooping to scare some little critters out, or at least for some good reason. But what? I saw the same flock or a similar one later in the day.

The trek to Cottonwood Wash was similar to the one from Sheets Gulch to 5 mile Wash, but the canyons seemed to dig deeper and I needed to go higher and higher. When I finally reached Cottonwood Canyon I was over 100' into the navaho. I attempted to follow a little side canyon into the Wash but dead-ended at a 75' drop—didn't need Nancy's Rule here. . . .

Before I knew it, the afternoon shadows were growing long. I quickly packed up, climbed out of my side canyon and hurried down Cottonwood Canyon to find a spot to cross. Well down canyon I found a break and promptly moved off towards Burro Canyon, scurrying to get there before dark[.] Scrambling over innumerable shale hills, gullies, and canyons, I finally reached Burro Canyon at dusk, found a water pocket and made camp on the north ridge.

28 Sandy Ranch, located in Garfield County, is a large cattle ranch adjoining the border of the national park.

29 Nancy was Becker's fiancée.



*The Golden Throne, the smooth rock formation dome on the right side of the photograph, is a prominent feature in Capitol Reef National Park. This photograph was taken in the 1930s or 1940s by Dr. Arthur Leroy Inglesby, Fruita resident.*

UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*Capitol Wash at Miner's Mountain | Tuesday, April 15*

I experienced a remarkable day.

I began my walk <through> of a final set of pastel carmel shale hills. It was a fond farewell to the shale that had trained my legs and soul the last couple of days.

Dropping into Pleasant Creek though was like a breath of spring in the desert. Pleasant Creek is another of the Waterpocket Fold's perennial streams, bringing snow-melt from Boulder and Miner's Mts. This morning it can gurgled sweet and clear. Lava boulders made their reappearance. In all, a most appropriate of names.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Pleasant Creek is likely the route of Thompson and his men in 1872, on their way to retrieve the cached boat at the mouth of the Dirty Devil River. Jack Hillers, a member of the party, described the experience: following "fresh Indian tracks," the party struck "a beautiful valley running northeast," the current location of Pleasant Creek Ranch. Hillers diary, June 13, 1872, in *Cleaving an Unknown World*, 100. Frederick Dellenbaugh, also a member of Thompson's 1872 party, recorded having "discovered a beautiful creek flowing rapidly," surrounded by "plenty of good grass." The

As I slowly made my way up the Canyon [of Carcass Creek], I became awestruck. In its lower reaches it is a wide open Navaho sandstone canyon. Unlike the narrows and towering, at times looming[,] walls of others Waterpocket Fold canyons I have wandered through, the valley here in the navaho is at times a half-a-mile wide. Great sand dunes covered at times with pinyons and junipers, willows, and an assortment of grasses and bushes are well-spaced over the light tan sand. . . .

I walked and boulder-hopped more quickly, but with a well-preserved awe up <a now swollen> Pleasant Creek through the remainder of the navaho, kayenta, and wingate formations, and arrived at Pleasant Creek Ranch.

Here was a ranch with character—old, wooden

men camped under "some cottonwood trees" and the next morning, after a restful sleep, "in gratitude we called the stream Pleasant Creek without an attempt at originality." Frederick S. Dellenbaugh, *A Canyon Voyage: The Narrative of the Second Powell Expedition down the Green-Colorado River from Wyoming, and the Explorations on Land, in the Years 1871 and 1872* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), 203.

fences and rusted farming equipment, horses viewing me with curiosity, and no more than a two lane road covered with more horse prints than auto prints. A broad valley cut out of Chinle formation lay in front of me with Miner's MT., tree-covered, west ahead of me. On a shale hill overlooking Pleasant Creek stood the Sleeping Rainbow Motel. Maybe because this was Monday, there was nobody around. (The word sleeping rainbow comes from the Navaho (or Ute or Paiute) word for the Waterpocket Fold—certainly a better description.)<sup>31</sup>

I wandered up the With Miner's Mt. in sight now, I again sat down with my topographic map and geologic map and decided on a route up the 1800' feet to the top. of The <surest> safe route would be to follow Pleasant Creek to Sulphur Creek and then to the ridge. However, the contour lines on the topographic map were just widely enough spaced to make Capitol Wash, a considerably shorter route, look plausible. My geologic map told me I would be walking through the Moenkopi formation and the Kaibab formation. . . .

I walked up the two-laner a couple of miles to Capitol Wash and headed up a dry steambled, passing great slabs of ripple rock in the Moenkopi, and walking on <its> the dry, caky soil. From the beginning I had to scramble up many a lip or through and over big boulders and rock falls. Twice, after entering the grey and tan of the kaibab limestone, I had to circumnavigate 50' dry falls. But always there was a way through and I managed to climb higher and higher on Miner's Mt.

As evening approached, I grew more confident I could make it up this route. <At one point,> In looking back down canyon, I was <immobi-

lized> grabbed by a view of the Golden Throne highlighted by the <intense> late afternoon sun. In the glory of this view I felt triumphant. My map reading had held true and I was rewarded with a grand sight.<sup>32</sup>

With the setting sun I made camp. It would be cold at this elevation tonight. I was not concerned about water—for the past couple of miles I was walking through deeper and deeper snow drifts. I would need my gaiters on top of Miner's Mountain.

*Fremont River | Wednesday, April 16*

Under heavy morning clouds and a brisk winds, I continued my walk up Capitol Wash yesterday morning. Since leaving the road to Sleeping Rainbow Ranch<sup>33</sup>, I had not even seen the print of a deer in Capitol Wash—a late spring was keeping them low.

Within a half-mile, I began encountering ponderosa pines, a tall, gallant pine with orangish bark. A wood pecker hawed at me and rattled around above. Within another half-mile I encountered a mining shaft: soon I began finding the normal signs of man—rusted cans, plastic gallon jugs, and the heavy-handed use of chain saws. Fthou Roads began branching off[f] in every direction as I reached the plateau. This must be Forest Service country I thought—very little care for the landscape and trash everywhere.

I sloshed and slid through the snow and ice directly west across Miner's Mountain. The wind and clouds began to concern me. If it were to rain hard on this snow, there would be flash flooding in the Fremont River, making the route even less plausible. I began to consider the alternative of going down Sulphur Creek.

As I approached the Carcass Creek drainage, signs of civilization appeared. There was a line

31 According to Ward Roylance, sleeping rainbow was "a name applied by Navajo Indians to the varicolored Chinle rock formation of Arizona and Utah." *The Enchanted Wilderness: A Red Rock Odyssey* (Torrey, UT: Four Corners West, 1986), 110. Frederick Dellenbaugh, writing fifty years after his work on John Wesley Powell's geological surveys, observed that "the Ute and Paiute words were familiar in that region [surrounding Ticaboo Creek] as well as the Navajo," though he acknowledged that "as a rule there were few Navajo terms north of the Colorado [River,] the Utes and Paiutes dominating that region." Dellenbaugh to Charles Kelly, November 6, 1932, box 1, fd. 4, MSS B 24, Frederick Samuel Dellenbaugh Papers, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah.

32 The Golden Throne, one of the park's stateliest landforms, is a straight-walled Navajo sandstone formation.

33 The ranch, situated along Pleasant Creek on property settled in 1882, was privately owned and operated until the Park Service acquired it, in piecemeal, in 1974, 1978, and 1995. The ranch is now used as a science field camp for college and public school students. Murphy, *A History of Wayne County*, 372–74.

of telephone/power poles heading toward Grover. In another mile I saw an old ranch house, unoccupied. I was crossing fields, bypassing the road that led over the hill into the heart of Grover, and going straight down Carcass Creek to the Fremont River. As I came down the valley, a pickup truck pulling a trailer slowly meandered down a road on the other side of the valley and disappeared towards the River. Soon I saw two fine new houses on my, the east, side of the valley. I passed the first—no sign of occupation, and walked towards the second, where I could see movement. Surely these people would know the condition of the Fremont River.

Allen and his wife provided me with a superb treat. They had lived in Grover for half-the-year for twelve or fourteen years, spending the remainder of their time in California. They had just arrived for the beginning of their Grover half. Yes, they answer to my question about the feasibility of getting down the Fremont River—and they invited me to stay for lunch. Real milk, bread, delightful company. They had designed the home themselves, and it was comfortable living space. There were big south<west> facing windows with eaves and a cement heat receiving wall in the living room (passive solar), the biggest stone fireplace I've ever seen, a big, spacious kitchen with a little den and sleeping nook connected to it—and all with a feeling of warmth and individualism. As I left, [my hosts] gave me two plastic bags: one with a piece of chicken and the other with some cherry turnovers “that Allen didn't like. If you don't like them, just throw them away.” I've <savored> saved one for this morning.

I wandered down the valley towards the River and realized that my meeting had altered the mind-set that had been developing over the previous ten days. For ten days I had increasingly thought less and less about people, and more and more about the landscape I was walking through. It struck me how man is such a thoroughly social animal and yet is adaptable <to>, and maybe needs at times, an individual non-human experience. <(a modern day reason for religion's viability?)>

I set myself back into the mode of mind that would get me <safely> bac down the Fremont and aware of my physical surroundings. Where

Carcass Creek enters the Fremont there is a large wide valley. The River is raging and route crossings would have to be picked with unerring care. Quickly it dropped into the kaibab limestone. I found a necessary crossing to the north side about a half-mile downstream. The current was exceedingly swift, but the water never got above thigh high and with careful stepping I crossed. From this spot the Fremont cuts a sharp, deep gorge through the kaibab, leaving steep talus slopes on its sides.

I found a spot to camp another half-mile downstream, after passing some defaced petroglyphs, high on a <south-facing> talus slope above a 15' waterfall. With chicken and turnovers to complement my freeze-dried dinner, I enjoyed a feast.

*Capitol Reef National Park Visitors Center—Sulphur Creek | Thursday, April 17*

Packing up my last day's belong[ing]s, I slipped into my comfortable old hiking boots and began working my way downstream. About a half mile from camp, I came to a spot where I could not continue on the north side. The Coconino Sandstone was beginning here. Unlike the kaibab sandstone, it is a harder, sharper cliff-forming tan sandstone. The formation is presents a striking cliff line near the top of the Grand Canyon, where I came to know it. Next to the redwall limestone and vishnu schist<sup>34</sup> and granite, it is the most conspicuous of the formations there.

I found a spot where someone had downed a cottonwood tree and made their way across. I followed the route after changing into my jungle boots. Water rushed by waist high. Another quarter-mile downstream and I encountered the same predicament—no sign of help from a tree here—I found a slow, wide spot in the river and carefully stepped from rock-to-rock along the bottom until I safely made it to the other side.

By this time I was getting concerned and moved my sleeping bag to the top of my pack. Before each crossing, I tested the waters without my pack to make certain I could make it across.

This process repeated itself 9 times in an cap-

34 A metamorphic rock type.

tivatin[g] journey downstream. In one spot I thought for awhile I would have to turn back. Both walls creased together and there appeared to be no way through without swimming—my pack could not withstand that punishment and some of my belongings would be ruined. Furthermore, I was uncertain whether things would get worse before they the canyon exit.

To make matters more discouraging, the underbrush by the river was nasty too my legs. But I did not want to change into my long pants, for I would have no dry pants for the cool night ahead.

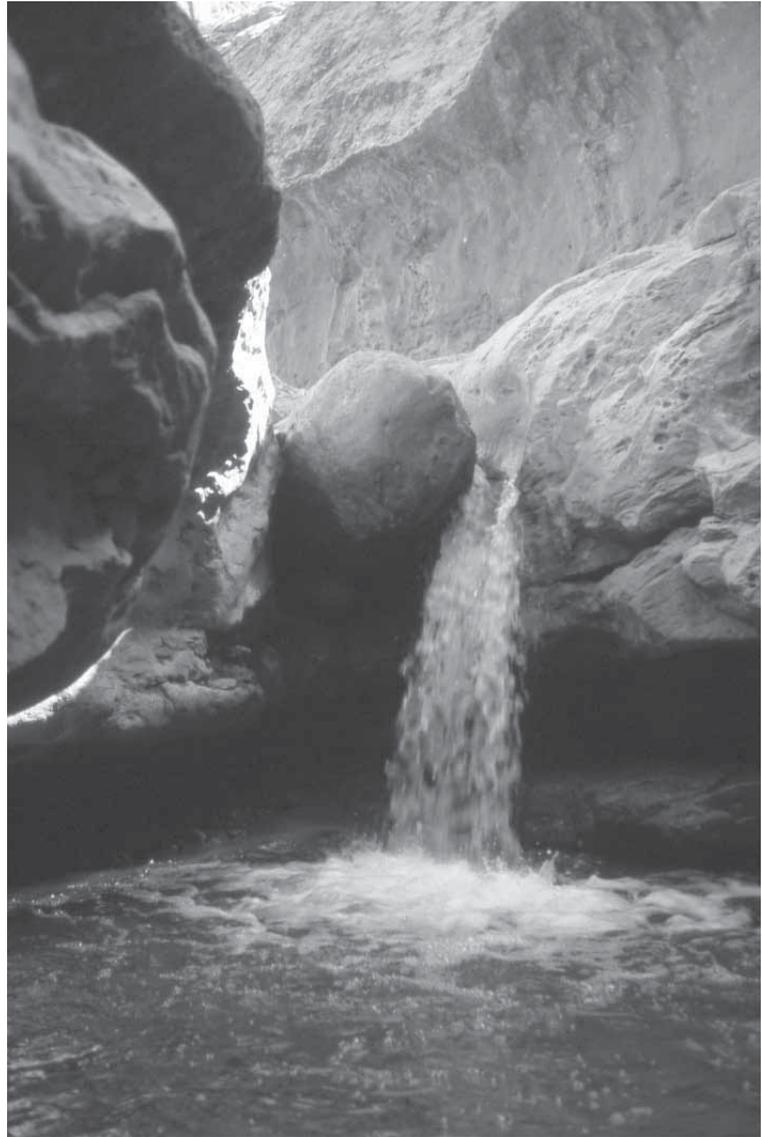
By the time I arrived at the Fremont River Canyon exit, I had lost my ensolite sleeping [pad] in the river, was numb cold, and scratched mercilessly about the legs and arms. It was a welcome relief to see the canyon open up and the Coconino sandstone and kaibab disappear behind me.<sup>35</sup>

*Sulphur Creek/Calf Canyon |  
Friday, April 18*

After packing for the final week and enjoying a can of red rasp[b]erries and a can of crab (lots of mmm's and aah's here), Joan [Degiorgio]<sup>36</sup> and

35 Although the Fremont River is one of "four points known where [one] can effect a passage" through the reef, in the words of the geologist Grove Karl Gilbert, "the way is difficult," as attested by Becker's account. See *Report on the Geology of the Henry Mountains*, 16.

36 Degiorgio joined Becker for the final week of his trek. She later had a career as a natural resources planner for state and federal agencies and the private sector. She is currently Northern



*One of the "gentle waterfalls and brief cascades," as described by Becker, that flows along Sulphur Creek, a tributary of the Fremont River.*

—  
JOAN DEGIORGIO

I started up Sulphur Creek, which comes in right at the Visitor's Center. The lower stretches were dreamy. It was a warm, clear day with a light breeze. We waded through pool after pool of refreshing, clear water. The water was warm down here in the Moenkopi. It had run for miles over flat, sun-warmed rocks. In spots there were gentle waterfalls and brief cascades. Joan had brought good weather and [it is] nice hiking with her.

We passed through a long stretch of the kaibab limestone. Like the walls of Capitol Wash and the Fremont River its fractured, tan, des-

Mountain Regional Director of the Nature Conservancy.



*Ralph Becker standing alongside petroglyphs in Paradise Flats.*

—  
JOAN DEGIORGIO

ert varnished facade made for easy hiking.

The Canyon opened up considerably in several spots upstream providing broad valleys and a sense of openness and light sensations. As the late afternoon shadows softened the canyon walls and highlighted features, Joan and I hiked in calm bliss up canyon.

*Ridge above Paradise Flats | Saturday, April 19*

We began the day early yesterday. With first light we started up our

fire, and ate a quick breakfast, and packed up. We were hiking by the time the sun hit us.

We walked across a broad valley where Hwy. 24 passes and made our way across Moenkopi flats to rejoin Sulphur Creek, passing the Rimrock Motel, its inviting pond, horses, <and> and red-winged blackbirds and other wildlife.

Sulphur Creek climbs steadily up Thousand Lake Mt. through the Chinle formation—pleasant, easy hiking...

Joan and I reached a wingate narrows that appeared to be impassable near the top of Sulphur Creek. We spent the next hour scrambling up a steep chinle gully that was soft with mud and snow to the canyon rim. The safety of Joan's company made our route possible—falling rocks and sliding feet were the norm. Unfortunately this was one spot of wingate the U.S. Geological Survey missed in putting together the geologic map for the Capitol Reef area.

From the top we followed a Forest Service road for about a mile until we found a trailhead leading to Paradise Flats. We dropped in Sulphur Creek for a liesurely lunch. It was another delightful day. Even at more than 8000' the sun was warm. We felt confident because here on the southeastern side of Thousand Lake Mt. there was a little snow. On north slopes the snowpatches were knee deep, but we had anticipated worse conditions. Our view from the vantage point would have been utterly breathtaking—I could see down the Fold to the

Golden Throne and the Henry Mts provided a backdrop. But the visibility was poor today and the haze left the Henry's only a bluish shadow in the distance. Joan and I pondered whether visibility was poor because of a seasonal condition, power plant emissions, or some long distance transport from an urban area.

We left our lunch wearing gaiters. As we moved north the snow drifts would grow deeper. The trail had not been used this spring, but with the aid of cairns and a set of horse prints, we were able to follow it to the ridge between Water Canyon and Paradise Draw. . . .

The shadows were growing longer. Joan and I were sinking into deeper and deeper snow with each north-facing slope we descended. Once I fell through the snow up to my hips and floundered in it until I could extricate myself. We pushed on diligently through, crossing Paradise Draw at sunset. After a long day of hiking we camped on a ridge above Paradise Flats (although the scene confused us a bit because the topographic maps again were not completely accurate)].

Today we drop into Paradise Flats and Deep Creek. This marks the end of the Waterpocket Fold's northward culmination. From our vantage point at the tail end of the day, topographic maps, and a flight over the area, it represents the wildest part of the Fold. The navaho is thrust skyward in huge and at times contorted domes, spires, and fins. I am excited to see this least frequented of places and enjoy it as a desert of my journey <up> through the Waterpocket Fold.

*Deep Creek | Sunday, April 20*

We awoke early again yesterday. It had been a warmer night than expected, but I had a hot breakfast of oatmeal and hot chocolate. We used, throughout our camp, snow from a neighboring bank for our water source.

We dropped down off the ridge onto Palisade Paradise Flats. It was a tricky little scramble through snow on slick kayenta sandstone. Without snow we would have been glued to the sandstone and easily traversed the hillside. But the term slick rock applied to this coun-

try comes from the condition we faced in the morning—wet sandstone, from snow or water, is like walking on banana peels.

The top of Palisades Flats is formed out of kayenta. Standing rocks of all sizes and shapes dot the landscape with waves of pastellic pinks and tans. A maze is created with the high points and low points not seeming to drain in any particular direction. We decided to make camp in a high, east facing area surrounded by spires, pin heads, whales, and contortions of rock that spurns the imagination. . . .

We spent the remainder of the morning and day exploring the uppermost portion of Deep Creek. . . .

Joan and I worked our way carefully through the kayenta into the navaho, leaving cairns and boot prints so we could find our way back to camp. Dropping down through the north slopes of the navaho, the footing was treacherous. In addition to the slickrock phenomenon of the kayenta, navaho crumbles easily when wet. Ledges for footholds are therefore particularly questionable. Frequently Joan and I would find ourselves breaking off[f] chunks of navaho and slipping and stumbling downhill for several feet. Fortunately, there were only large patches of snow on northfacing slopes and deep in canyons.

Deep Creek is all-over-the-place country. In attempting to follow what we thought was Deep Creek, we climbed up a steep canyon only to find another canyon leading downward behind it. We moved deep into the heart of upper Deep Creek, following streambeds to dead ends and then following another route. . . .

We rather easily found our way back to camp. <The> topographic map of this area is virtually impossible to read, but on the way back to camp, I believe we finally determined our location and where we had been for the day.

*Mouth of Water Canyon | Monday, April 21*

Paradise Flats is a sagebrush valley of sand and lava boulders with domes and fins of kayenta and navaho sandstone rising out of the floor. . . .

As we meandered through the land of the giant standing rocks, we followed, for the most part, a web of heavily used deer trails. Then we spotted them—a herd of nine, another of four. We came within 40 yards of the first herd before they spooked and bounded off. I had seen some deer earlier in the trip at the Coleman Canyons, but they appeared much more cognizant of the dangers of man and did not remain in sight. We watched these deer, as they watched us, for ten minutes before we finally walked out of sight.

Near the bottom of the sagebrush designated Paradise Flats I spotted a petroglyph of a bighorn sheep on a distant wall with my binoculars. Joan and I trotted over and discovered a magnificent array of petroglyphs—Bighorn sheep, men shooting bows and arrows, deer, large figures possibly representing gods, symbols, wheels, and the alleged water symbol ([spiral symbol]). For 50 yards the walls were scratched with scrawl<ed>ing and maybe artwork of a people who lived off the plentiful bounty this land offered.<sup>37</sup> From the ledge we had a view of the Henry's and the lower end of Paradise Flats. (Unfortunately, others felt obliged more recently to add their handiwork. Several names were carved in the rock next to the petroglyphs, probably cowboys who brought the herds through here to winter and summer grazing above and below this valley. One name, though, was of particular interest—Wm. Hickman, 1929. A Hickman of that era was a strong backer of the creation of Capitol Reef National Monument (1936), and Hickman Natural Bridge is named after him in the Park.)<sup>38</sup>

37 This is one of a few impressive rock panels within Capitol Reef National Park, the best known along Highway 24 and in Capitol Gorge. This was largely the handiwork of the Fremont, who occupied the eastern Great Basin and western Colorado Plateau from about 650 to 1250 A.D. See David B. Madsen, *Exploring the Fremont* (Utah Museum of Natural History, 1989), ix. For the meaning of this rock art, see Alex Patterson, *A Field Guide to Rock Art Symbols of the Greater Southwest* (Boulder: Johnson Books, 1992).

38 Becker is referring to Joseph S. Hickman, who, along with his brother-in-law Ephraim P. Pectol, was an early promoter of what they called Wayne Wonderland and advocate for Capitol Reef National Monument. Hickman drowned at Fish Lake in 1925, four years before “Wm. Hickman”—identity not known—inscribed his name on rock. See Charles Kelly, “The Fathers of Capitol Reef National Park,” *History Blazer* (September 1995).

We proceeded across a ridge and dropped onto a second path of standing rock. A pinyon-juniper vegetative cover gave us a different perspective. We were also troubled during this stretch by an almost solid cover of cactus—little ones that jumped up and grabbed boots, socks, and legs. The little devils had no inclination to stay in the ground. Again, however, the panorama of standing rocks filled us with the glory of the sunny day. . . .

After lunch we wandered downstream and immediately saw hopeful signs—a steep canyon to the north and a general opening of the canyon. Soon we entered Deep Creek and rejoiced.

Deep Creek is a big, broad canyon here. Filled with lava boulders and a hard, dense silts[te]one (meta-morphosed?) <of> layered whites and pinkish purples, it is a stately sight. Massive navaho walls line its downward path. To the northeast, in spots, carmel shale walls can be seen.

We soon passed Water Canyon, dropping into the kayenta again. Pleasant <b>Boulder hopping and sand waddling made the trip downstream on to our camping spot at an unnamed 3-mile side canyon an enjoyable trek.

#### *Mouth of Water Canyon | Tuesday, April 22*

Yesterday was again a most pleasant of days. We left camp to day-hike the canyon above us. The wind blew a cool morning breeze and the sun struggled through for brief moments.

Upon arriving at a side spot in the canyon with a large pool, Joan and I bathed and laundered. With no sun and a brisk breeze, it was an eye-opening, <goose> skin-bumping experience. We sat for a spell at this spot. The kayenta walls were carved in intricate configurations, webbed and pock-marked like colorful swiss cheese. I spotted a large arch halfway up the kayenta wall on the north side of the canyon. The streambed was filled with an assortment of black <and> red lava boulders, chunks of kayenta, and a lying on a bed of white, tan, and orange sands.

We slowly picked ourselves up and gradually moved up canyon. We were not in a small water-

pocket of snow melt here. A hard top layer of the purple and blue-grey of the chinle was exposed and a stream with large pools flowed. . . .

We stopped for lunch in a niche of the kayenta to escape the gusts of cool wind. With the amount of water in this canyon, I had begun to think that this must be Water Canyon—that I had misinterpreted the map. With all of the water and a major junction in the stream just ahead of us, my beliefs inkling[s] were confirmed. On the topographic map, there was nothing similar to this in no-name canyon. . . .

I crossed over a recent rock-fall with green Mormon tea<sup>39</sup> crushed between some rocks and soon we left the stream and lushness behind. We entered the wingate formation and immediately began encountering steep ledges in the streambed. We found an old, caved in pit house (for storage by passing cowboys?) and worked our way around several a few insurmountable falls in the stream path. After pass re-entering the kayenta we confronted a rock ledge we could not surmount and returned down canyon. Upon scouring the kayenta walls I viewed the surrounded kayenta walls and detected a way up past this spot. From here to the head of Water Canyon (which we crossed the top of), looked plausible.

A cold wind and overcast cast

<sup>39</sup> This shrub with scale-like leaves, known as ephedra, is common throughout the American Southwest.



*Ralph Becker at a campsite during the final week of his trek.*

—  
JOAN DEGIORGIO

sky quickend our pace back to camp. We stopped for water and our drying socks, made a fire, and set up camp. Shrimp creole last night for a repast. Passing clouds sprinkled intermittently throughout the night.

Yesterday, for the first time I could sense the end of my journey. Sadness, accomplishment, and a readiness for (at least a brief) return to home filled me a varying moments.

*Deep Creek at South Desert | Wednesday, April 23*

We broke our camp of two nights at the mouth of Water Canyon after another liesurely sunrise breakfast, when we were entertained by two squabbling ravens.

About a half-mile downstream we found the mouth of no-name canyon, dropped our packs and day-hiked, . . .

Under ominous skies we boulder skipped and trotted to our packs at the mouth of no-name canyon, pulled them on with ponchos in easy reach, and began our trek out of the gorge of Deep Creek. Cool, hard winds and blue-black skies increased the startling contrasts and stark beauty as we quickly made headway <through> to the widening meanders of Deep Creek. We passed out of the kayenta, back into the domes and towers of the navaho, and finally into the carmel foundation. In this northern most portion of the Waterpocket Fold the carmel is startlingly thrilling. It takes on a range of colors broader than the imagination can fathom—browns, tans, oranges, reds, greys, purples, yellows, blues, and greens. Rounding each corner was like entering a new world of color. The deep, dark clouds contributed to contrast and splendor.

The rain came. Intermittently we felt a few drops throughout our jaunt down Deep Creek. But near the bottom of the carmel a burst of rain sent us scrambling under a convenient overhang for cover. Sheets of water blue past us up the canyon <amid rolling thunder and lightning>. A half hour later the shower stopped as suddenly as it had started. The sweet smells of wet sages and moisture filled us. Sunlight glistened off boulders and vegetation—a delightful spring cloudburst.

We broke out of Deep Creek onto a large valley, the South Desert. For the last mile we could see an enormous tower of entrada sandstone. It marks the exit of Deep Creek to the wide-open desert, a gate-keeper several hundred feet high. The light occasionally silhouetted it, giving the tower an even more prominent appearance.

We walked a few miles down the South Desert (still on Deep Creek) with reddish-purple

and grey shale walls to the east, the carmel of the Fold to the West, and the Henry Mts. to the south. Behind us Thousand Lake Mt. was shrouded in a cloud. Light broke through the clouds in various places, highlighting on[e] feature or another. Rainbows hung over formations, adding to the majesty.

We made camp at dusk, attempting to set up some protection from the rain we anticipated, using our ponchos and lava boulders. There were no trees or hard rock to find cover under. After a fire of sage and assorted brush roots and branches, we crawled in under our makeshift protection and as it began to rain. A steady rain fell for most of the night. Sleep was difficult and I became damp, but our protection, for the most part held up. . . .

Deep Creek in its canyons, for both Joan and I, was the wildest country we had ever been in. We did not see one human footprint for five days of hiking. Only the petroglyphs and some limited, decrepit signs spoke of man's <prior> presence. And in our visit we could only catch a glimpse of the wonders of that region. It comforts me to know that vast and spectacular spots like Deep Creek remain for us with an adventurous twinge.

*Thursday, April 24<sup>40</sup>*

The cool, wet morning helped quicken our steps as we began hiking down Deep Creek through the South Desert to the Fremont River and the end of the trip. Despite less sleep than I had become accustomed to, my adrenaline pushed me tirelessly as we crisscrossed the meanders of Deep Creek. . . .

The rain had packed down the sandy and clay soil, making walking easier—we could step out rather than be bogged down. Cattle trails (more winter grazing territory here) helped us pick the best route through the Deep Creek valley.

As we rose above the intermittent stream on to benches and hills, views of the Henry Mts. to the south, Thousand Lake Mt. behind us to the north, and as we moved further south, Capitol

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40 Written one day late, this entry is dated April 25.

Reef, brought on waves of nostalgic feeling for the land I visited for the past three weeks. From the beginning the Henry's had been my landmark and guide of northward progress to the east. I was on my last stretch—it seemed appropriate to be walking toward them.

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*Ralph Becker is an attorney and planner. He is currently serving as the thirty-fourth mayor of Salt Lake City.*

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## WEB SUPPLEMENT



Visit [history.utah.gov/uhqextras](http://history.utah.gov/uhqextras) for Ralph Becker's reflections on his Waterpocket Fold trek thirty-five years later.

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