



Did Prospectors See Rainbow Bridge Before 1909?

By JAMES H. KNIPMEYER

August 14, 2009, will mark the one-hundred-year anniversary of the official discovery of Rainbow Natural Bridge in far southeastern Utah. This was accomplished in 1909 by the combined parties of Professor Byron Cummings of the University of Utah and William B. Douglass of the U. S. Government Land Office. Writing later, *Rainbow Bridge and Navajo Mountain, overlooking Forbidding Canyon.*

James Knipmeyer is a retired high school teacher from Lee's Summit, Missouri.

Professor Cummings said, “Had others been there before us; who can say? If so they left no sign.”¹

This sentiment was echoed by a member of the Cummings party, Donald Beauregard, who, shortly after the discovery stated, “No sign of any previous visit by white man was visible....”² An employee of the Douglass group concurred: “[At the mouth of] the canyon [Forbidding Canyon at the Colorado River]... below the arch, we saw remnants of a campsite with signs of a fire. On the canyon wall near the fire bed, someone had written something in charcoal from the fire.... [But] there wasn’t any sign of them having been at the arch.”³

For at least eighty years, however, the possibility has been raised that the great stone span had been seen by other Anglos as far back as the late 1800s. This point may have first been broached in published form by Harold S. Colton and Frank C. Baxter in their 1932 book, *Days Spent in the Painted Desert and San Francisco Mountains*, where they stated: “The [Rainbow] bridge ... very probably was visited by the early beaver trappers who approached it from the Colorado River.”⁴

Beaver trappers most likely did not explore the Aztec Creek–Forbidding Canyon drainage in which Rainbow Bridge is situated because the stream’s riparian habitat was not suitable for fur-bearing animals. Nevertheless, the possibility of a pre-1909 visitation was presented to a broad reading audience by historian C. Gregory Crampton in his 1964 book *Standing Up Country*, wherein he states quite emphatically, “Unquestionably, Rainbow Bridge had been visited before 1909 by prospectors who were working their way up from the Colorado.”⁵

Prospectors were much more likely early visitors than beaver trappers. The discovery of placer gold deposits in the high gravel bars of the Colorado River had brought hundreds of men into Glen Canyon after 1883. However, they did not limit their prospecting to just the main canyon, but worked up the tributaries such as Aztec Creek as well. “Every stream, it is reasonable to assume, particularly those with boulder-strewn beds was prospected from its mouth. Those heading in the laccolithic mountains, including Navajo Mountain, were prospected high up their slopes to find the source of the placer gold in the main canyon.”⁶ There are at least four separate claims that have been made that Anglo prospectors

¹ Byron Cummings, “Sa Nonnezoshie” Byron Cummings Collection, MS 0200, Box 5, folder 32, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona.

² Donald Beauregard, “Nonnezhozhi, The Father of All Natural Bridges,” *Deseret Evening News*, October 2, 1909.

³ Dan Perkins, interview by Grant M. Reeder, November 16, 1966. Excerpts in author’s possession.

⁴ Harold S. Colton and Frank C. Baxter, *Days Spent in the Painted Desert and San Francisco Mountains* (Flagstaff: Museum of Northern Arizona Press, 1932), 68.

⁵ C. Gregory Crampton, *Standing Up Country: The Canyonlands of Utah and Arizona* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 154.

⁶ C. Gregory Crampton, *Historical Sites in Glen Canyon, Mouth of San Juan River to Lee’s Ferry*, Anthropological Paper No. 46 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, June 1960), 98.

did, in fact, see Rainbow Bridge before 1909. This article will review all four claimant stories, and will examine the probability and validity of each, as well as provide background material on the history of mineral prospecting in the Rainbow Bridge-Navajo Mountain region.

Prospecting in the angle of the Colorado and San Juan Rivers that bracket Navajo Mountain on the west and to the north actually begins with one of the best known “lost” mines in the entire West. The story of the Merrick-Mitchell silver mine, or as it is often called by a Navajo name, the Pish-la-ki, has its inception in the latter part of the 1870s. The almost mythical status of this lode has inspired many different versions, but based on first-hand and contemporary accounts the story seems to go like this.

In 1878 a prospector by the name of Charles Merrick, while passing through the Navajo country between Fort Wingate, New Mexico, and Lee’s Ferry on the Colorado River in northern Arizona, discovered “three crude smelters” where the Indians, he believed, had been working metallic silver from silver ore.⁷ In late December 1879, Merrick, accompanied by Hernan C. Mitchell, returned to try to find the mine and secure additional specimens of ore. Mitchell was the son of Henry L. Mitchell who had a ranch on the San Juan River just below the mouth of McElmo Creek in present-day San Juan County, Utah. When the two failed to return within a specified time, a party of men set out in search of them.

The search party found that during January 1880, the two prospectors had been killed by Indians in what was at that time known as Monumental Valley, though the name has since been somewhat shortened to just Monument Valley. Local Navajos accused a small band of mixed Paiute/Utes, while they, in turn, blamed the Navajos. Traces of silver ore found with the prospectors’ equipment led members of the search party to believe that Merrick and Mitchell had located a source of silver and were on their way back to the San Juan and southwestern Colorado settlements.⁸ Indeed, a second group of men who returned the next month in February to secure the remains of the two bodies, reported that though “they were killed in Monumental Valley, Arizona... they [the Indians] admitted following Mitchell and his partner for four days to get a chance to ambush them and kill them.”⁹

Cass Hite, a member of this second group, would in later years become synonymous with gold prospecting in the Glen Canyon region of southern Utah. However, in the fall of 1881, he outfitted with four other men to

⁷ Contemporary accounts offer different spellings of Merrick’s name including Myrick and Merritt. Merritt is most likely correct, though “Merrick” is the name that has come down to us today. Later, samples of this ore had supposedly assayed at 90 percent silver. David E. Miller, *Hole-in-the-Rock* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1975), 91.

⁸ “Killed by Indians,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), March 16, 1880.

⁹ J.Y. Carpenter to Secretary of the Interior, February 28, 1880, Record Group 75, Letters Received New Mexico Superintendency, 1858-1907, Office of Indian Affairs, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D. C.



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hunt for the rumored silver mine of Merrick and Mitchell in Navajo country. They believed the silver mine to be located in one of the canyons between Monumental [Monument] Valley and Navajo Mountain.¹⁰ One of the four, M. S. Foote, left his name carved into the sandstone wall of the Long Canyon branch of the Tsegi Canyon, along with the date December 16, 1881. The extent of their search is indicated by a second inscription left by Foote in upper Forbidding Canyon, southwest of Navajo Mountain, dated twelve days later on December 28.

Discovery party and horses on the slick rocks west of Navajo Mountain on their way to Rainbow Bridge. Photo by Neil M. Judd, August 13, 1909.

While no silver mine was located, gold samples were found in some of the igneous dikes of Monumental Valley. In the spring of 1882, a much larger party, again including Cass Hite, started on a return trip from Durango, Colorado. Evidently the gold findings did not amount to much, as the expedition soon turned its attention once more to the “Myrick mine... supposed to have been located south-east of the Navajo Mountain.”¹¹ They prospected every canyon from today’s Chinle Wash west to Navajo Mountain. When part of the expedition returned to Durango, several members remained behind to continue the search in “a small tract of country which they had not yet entered.”¹² Names and dates carved and drawn on canyon walls by several members of the remaining searchers indicate that this area is near Navajo Mountain.

Cash Cade and Notley C. Young carved and wrote their names in

¹⁰ “New Mineral Excitement,” *The Durango Record* (Colorado), January 20, 1882.

¹¹ “Another Song Sung by Navajo Explorers,” *Rocky Mountain News*, April 14, 1882.

¹² “Nothing of Note Comes from Navajo Mountain,” *Rocky Mountain News*, April 3, 1882.

charcoal at Inscription House, a prehistoric Anasazi cliff dwelling ruin in Neetsin Canyon, a branch of Navajo Canyon. They continued their search, along with fellow prospector Lorenzo Reed, in Toenleshushhe, the next tributary canyon to the north. Back up on the plateau, a few miles north toward Navajo Mountain at Tse Ya Toe Spring, George M. Miller also carved and wrote his name in charcoal on the alcove wall. He also incised his name on the sandstone wall of Cottonwood Wash, just east of Navajo Mountain. Finally, George Emmerson carved his name on a ledge of rock on the southern slope of the mountain itself and again in the upper part of Forbidding Canyon to the southwest. In each instance where a date was included with a name, it was always 1882. One of George Emmerson's inscriptions recorded the month and day as April 1.

This group finally returned to southwestern Colorado about the middle of April, having seen nothing of the fabled Merrick-Mitchell mine. However, they did discover a large ledge of mineral-bearing ore, and so by mid-May yet another party of hopeful prospectors departed Durango "to take possession of the great copper mine which was located by Cass Hite on his last exploring tour a few weeks ago."¹³ Three contiguous copper claims were located near the head of what they named, and is still called, Copper Canyon. However, for Hite at least, the quest for the Pish-la-ki silver mine was still on the agenda.

For some three months during the winter of 1882-83, Hite spent much time with the Navajo headman of the region, Hoskaninni and his son, Hoskaninni Begay. Depending on which story Hite told in later years, Hoskaninni either agreed to sell him the silver mine "for two thousand pesos," but backed out when other members of the tribe angrily disagreed, or simply led Hite "around for five or six weeks" until the prospector finally gave up in disgust.¹⁴

Either way, Hite now turned his back on the San Juan country and the Merrick-Mitchell silver mine. By September of 1883, he was on the Colorado River prospecting for placer gold in the gravel bars of Glen Canyon. There he remained, around Trachyte Creek and what became the mining camp of Hite and at his "ranch" and mining claim at Ticaboo Creek, until his death in 1914.

William F. Williams begins a remarkable seven-page statement given on May 22, 1929, in Winslow, Arizona, with the words, "I saw Rainbow Bridge in 1884 in company with my father, J. Patterson Williams." As this is the earliest dated claim of Anglos visiting Rainbow Bridge prior to its official discovery in 1909, it is important that an abbreviated form of his statement be given:

¹³ "A Prospecting Party Goes to Monumental Valley," *Rocky Mountain News*, May 23, 1882.

¹⁴ For two different accounts see Pearl Baker, *Trail on the Water* (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company, 1969), 63; and James W. Black, Statement of James W. Black, July 10, 1930, Gladwell Richardson Collection, Arizona Historical Society, Northern Division, hereinafter AHSND MS. 48, Cline Library, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona.

.... Hosteen Hoskinnini went with us, as he said he could show us where the silver prospect was that had been worked by Merrick and Mitchell. But as it turned out Hoskinnini didn't know anything much about it at all.... I really think Hoskinnini, who had never actually seen this place himself, believed he could take us there because he had talked to the Indians who killed Merrick and Mitchell in Monument Valley.

.... It must have been in November that year when we started from Sierra Capitan for Navajo Mountain....

We crossed the upper end of Piute Canyon, staying a couple of days or so with the Piute Indians at the farms there.... We went first to a place called later Owl Bridge, a natural arch on the north side of Navajo Mountain. We prospected around there for awhile, with Hoskinnini trying to obtain more information about this canyon Merrick and Mitchell had been in. We went up on top of the mountain....

After working the mountain for awhile we went down from the top over a bench to Willow Springs and then from the west side into what is now called Cliff Canyon, and Bridge Canyon. These canyons were then known as Broken Leg Canyon and Under-the-Arm Canyon....

Broken Leg Canyon got its name because of a party of white prospectors jumped sometime earlier in the year over between Willow Springs and the rim of Navajo Canyon and one of them escaped. But he broke his leg over in that canyon. All the other prospectors were killed....

I do not know why Bridge Canyon was known as Under-the-Arm Canyon, except that was the Navajo name for it....

This place [now] called Redbud Pass.... We had absolutely no difficulty getting through there in the winter of 1884. One place was very narrow, but we definitely did not have to unload our pack stock and carry our supplies through. We did not even dismount to get through. The Indians were using it all the time.

It was in December (1884) when we came out....

After leaving Rainbow Bridge, Williams describes a convoluted and completely implausible path to "Ute Ford," just below the junction of the San Juan and Colorado Rivers, traversing downstream on the southeast side of the Colorado to the Crossing of the Fathers, and then back upstream to Cummings Mesa before descending into Navajo Canyon. His statement continues:

Yes, there were names cut on the base of the free end of the arch of Rainbow Bridge when we saw it, also some names written in charcoal on the cliff walls farther down towards the river.

The names I can recall definitely were those of Billy Ross, a man named Montgomery, Jim Black, George Emmerson, Ed Randolph and another man named Wydel. We did not cut our names on the base of the bridge....

... we [then] went into Billy Ross Canyon, a side canyon of West Canyon. Navajo Canyon was then called West Canyon....

Hearing of likely prospects farther up the canyon we went on through to Inscription House ruins as they were later to be called....

Sometime after the first of the year, 1885, Hoskinnini pulled out and went back north to the mesa where he lived (Hoskinnini Mesa).... Father got hold of Long Back [a local Navajo] and he went with us.... Found a likely copper prospect....

We visited Square Butte, went out there from the canyon.... Camped two nights near White Craig natural bridge....

Father decided we should be going on home, so we pulled up and left..., coming on down the break in the mesa between White Horse Mesa and Red Mesa by Tshahotsoni, or Hole-in-the-rock [today's White Mesa Arch].

Camped one night with George McAdams at Red Lake [present-day Tonalea, Arizona].

In 1885 Father still believed silver or gold could be found around Navajo Mountain. Ben [Bill Williams' brother] and I went with him and we set up a small trading camp near Willow Springs. Father stayed there awhile, but got discouraged and left Ben and me there to sell out what we had packed in....

The first time I saw Rainbow Bridge it was about the 20th of November 1884. The next year Ben and I were there with my father around the 15th of February....¹⁵

Though Williams' statement was given in 1929, knowledge of it did not become generally known to the public until 1955 when writer Weldon F. Heald published an article, "Who Discovered Rainbow Bridge?" in the *Sierra Club Bulletin* that included the entire Williams statement and other background information.¹⁶

William F. "Bill" Williams was born in September 1870, in Marysville, California. His father Jonathan P. "J. P." Williams, was also born in California and, according to his granddaughter, "from boyhood his main interest in life was hunting gold." In 1880, J.P. Williams relocated to New Mexico to work for the Atlantic & Pacific Railroad. While Williams was there a friend, Jack "Kit" Carson, told the elder Williams about a fabulous mine in the Navajo Mountain country of northern Arizona. In 1882 Williams moved his family to Blue Canyon on the Navajo Indian Reservation, roughly halfway between the railroad town of Winslow and Navajo Mountain, so he could be nearer the "lost gold mine." Williams ran a trading post at Blue Canyon and searched for gold and silver in his spare time with his primary objective to locate the "silver prospect that had been worked by Merrick and Mitchell."¹⁷

Williams made at least one prospecting trip north to the Navajo Mountain area in the summer of 1882. In a statement made in early August of that year to U. S. Indian Agent Galen Eastman at Fort Defiance, Arizona, he said that he and a companion, William A. Ross, "have been prospecting and mining for the last few months in the country lying northwest in Arizona and southeastern Utah."¹⁸ In the upper part of Forbidding Canyon, southwest of Navajo Mountain, is carved the name "J. P. Williams 6/2 82."

Williams' claim that he, his father, and older brother Ben saw Rainbow Bridge in November 1884, and again in February 1885, has come under some scrutiny since the publication of Heald's 1955 *Sierra Club Bulletin*

¹⁵ W. F. Williams, Statement of W. F. Williams, May 22, 1929, Gladwell Richardson manuscript collection, 1930-1980, MS 48, AHSND.

¹⁶ Weldon F. Heald, "Who Discovered Rainbow Bridge?" *Sierra Club Bulletin*, 40:8 (October 1955): 24-28. Mrs. Bernetta "Billie" Williams Yost, daughter of William F. Williams and a resident of Flagstaff, Arizona, had in her possession the 1929 statement which she shared with Heald. In subsequent years Mrs. Yost authored two books, portions of which covered the Rainbow Bridge sightings in 1884-85.

¹⁷ Billie Williams Yost, *Bread Upon the Sands* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1958), and *Diamonds in the Desert* (Flagstaff, Arizona: Silver Spruce Publishing Co., 1987).

¹⁸ Jonathan P. Williams, "Statement, August 4, 1882" Record Group 75, Letters Received, 1882-1886, No. 14834, Office of Indian Affairs, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D. C.



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article. In 1969, Otis H. Chidester raised several questions about the 1884-85 visits in an article he authored on the 1909 discovery of Rainbow Bridge.¹⁹

William F. Williams' statement was not made until twenty years after the 1909 "discovery" by the Cummings-Douglass expedition. Why did he wait so long? According to his daughter, the 1929 statement was made at the request of writer Gladwell "Toney" Richardson, who was gathering information and stories as background material for articles he wrote for various Western magazines and publications. Thus, Williams was not only recalling events which took place almost forty-five years earlier, he was also only fourteen years old at the time.

It also bothered Chidester that Williams was not seemingly impressed with Rainbow Bridge. Here is the largest natural rock span in the entire United States, the Capitol Building in Washington, D. C., could just fit beneath its stone arch, and Williams, according to his daughter, "... didn't think anything much of it."²⁰ Chidester postulated that perhaps the three Williamses actually saw another natural arch or bridge in the area. In his 1929 statement, Bill Williams does mention "three natural bridges, "one of them... a huge land bridge," in nearby Navajo Canyon.²¹

Rainbow Bridge, August 14, 1909

Front Row: Left to Right, Mike's Boy, John Wetherill, Dr. Byron Cummings, W.B. Douglass, and Malcolm B. Cummings. Back Row: F. English, Dan Perkins, Jack Keenan, Gene Rogerson, Neil M. Judd, and Donald Beaugerard.

¹⁹ Otis H. Chidester, "The Discovery of Rainbow Bridge," *The Smoke Signal* No. 20 (Fall 1969):216-20.

²⁰ Heald, "Who Discovered Rainbow Bridge," 26.

²¹ Williams, Statement, 5.

Finally, Chidester talked about Redbud Pass, the steep, narrow declivity connecting Cliff Canyon with Bridge Canyon. He correctly pointed out that traveler and explorer Charles L. Bernheimer of New York City and the Richardson family of nearby Rainbow Lodge, both in the early 1920s, had to make use of blasting powder and dynamite to make the pass negotiable for horses and pack animals. Williams, however, stated categorically that "We had absolutely no trouble getting through there.... We did not even dismount...."²²

Most of the Williams statement is a fairly straight-forward account of a prospecting trip. Their route from "Sierra Capitan" (today's Agathla Peak) in Monument Valley to Navajo Mountain is geographically correct and completely plausible, as is their return trip from the Navajo Canyon area homeward to Blue Canyon. It is the Rainbow Bridge portion which does not jibe with the others. Furthermore, the scant two paragraphs of the seven-page document have been seemingly inserted after the fact. Their placement does not fit in the chronological sequence of events nor relate geographically.²³ After the 1884-85 prospecting trip to Navajo Mountain, Bill Williams worked at his father's Blue Canyon Trading Post for seven years before going to the Keams Canyon Trading Post for five years. After marrying and living in Winslow, Arizona, Williams, with his family, ran the Red Lake Trading Post, some forty-five miles to the northwest of Winslow, from 1914 until 1928. Williams spent the remainder of his life back in Winslow, where he was interviewed by Gladwell Richardson in 1929. He was killed in an automobile accident in 1940.

Bill's father, J. P. Williams, finally gave up hope of finding gold or silver in the Navajo Mountain area. In 1889 he sold the Blue Canyon Trading Post and moved his family to Winslow. For several years in the 1890s, he was involved with various gold mining operations on the San Juan River in southeastern Utah. In 1899 he was reportedly killed by Yaqui Indians in Mexico while still hunting for his elusive big strike.

Bill's older brother, James Benjamin, or Ben as he was always known, stayed on at Blue Canyon in 1889 to help run the trading post for the new owners. He started his own trading post at Cow Springs, Arizona, about

²² Williams, "Statement," 3. Later writers have also questioned the Williams account. In 1992, geographer Stephen C. Jett wrote a lengthy article concerning the 1909 Rainbow Bridge discovery and, while briefly describing the Williams claim, brought up no points or questions concerning its validity. See Stephen C. Jett, "The Great Race to Discover Rainbow Natural Bridge in 1909," *Kiva*, 58:1 (1992): 43-45. In 1999 Hank Hassell raised two objections about the Williams statement. Like Chidester, Hassell had trouble reconciling the ease of the Williams crossing of Redbud Pass with the difficulty all parties since that time encountered. In addition were the several names that Williams indicated he and his father found carved on the free-standing end of the bridge. Cummings and members of his party, as well as those of the Douglass group, found no such names or any other signs that other whites had been to Rainbow Bridge prior to 1909. Stories that the names were removed before the 1909 discovery have little or no credence as any such abrasive erasures would have left noticeable marks on the soft sandstone of the bridge. Hank Hassell, *Rainbow Bridge: An Illustrated History* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1999), 62-64.

²³ It may be that the Rainbow Bridge part of the Williams account was added by Gladwell Richardson a prolific writer of western novels and magazine articles who obtained the Williams statement in 1929.



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1895 and was listed in the 1900 U. S. Federal Census for Arizona as an “Indian trader.” In 1914 he ran his brother’s Red Lake Trading Post, but when Bill moved there permanently in 1915, Ben “took off immediately.”²⁴ He died about 1944.

The Colorado River and Glen Canyon at the Mouth of Aztec Creek.

As a final note to the Williams family involvement with Rainbow Bridge, there is one last point to consider. A visitor to Navajo Mountain and Rainbow Bridge in 1927 reported that “... the Navajos have told of a party of three white men visiting the bridge ‘years and years ago’...”²⁵ Could this have possibly been J. P., Bill, and Ben Williams in February of 1885?

In May 1939, the *Saturday Evening Post* magazine carried a lengthy article, complete with color photographs by Utah historian and writer Charles Kelly. The feature concerned the 1938 Colorado River trip through Glen Canyon by Ohio industrialist Julius F. Stone and Kelly. Floating from Hite, Utah, to Lee’s Ferry, Arizona, the boating expedition visited many of the historic sites and scenic features of the region along the way. One of these was Rainbow Natural Bridge, and included in this section of the article is the following significant statement: “...the same old prospector... declares it [Rainbow Bridge] was first seen by Jim Black, in 1894, while exploring the flat mesa above.”²⁶

Thus came into published print the next claimant of a prospector seeing

²⁴ Yost, *Diamonds in the Desert*, 145.

²⁵ Rupert L. Larsen, “Rainbow Natural Bridge Visited by Nash Travelers,” *The Nash News*, June 1927, 12.

²⁶ Charles Kelly, “At Eighty-three He is an Explorer,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, May 6, 1939, 83.



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Rainbow Bridge years before the 1909 Cummings-Douglass expedition. The “old prospector,” Dan Leroy by name, was a hermit-type recluse living in the wilds of the remote Salmon River in Idaho. There he was encountered by river-running enthusiast Dr. Russell G. Frazier of Bingham Canyon, in 1937. Leroy had been telling Frazier about his experiences as a prospector on the Colorado River in 1894 when he mentioned Jim Black and Rainbow Bridge. Frazier was subsequently a member of the 1938 Stone river trip.

The Colorado River with Navajo Mountain in the background.

Black remains a rather mysterious figure and, interestingly enough, what is known about him comes to us mainly from Gladwell “Toney” Richardson. On July 10 and 11, and again on September 27, 1930, in Flagstaff, Black gave “statements” to Richardson detailing his prospecting adventures in the Navajo Mountain region during the decade of the 1890s. Presumably, as he had done the previous year with William F. Williams, Richardson interviewed Black to collect information and stories as background material for his writing. Unlike with Williams, Richardson did succeed in getting a story published about Black, though it centered on his dramatic rescue of a Paiute Indian girl and subsequent discovery of rich gold diggings. Rainbow Bridge is not mentioned at all.²⁷

In the 1930 U. S. Federal Census for Arizona, there is only one James Black shown as a resident of Flagstaff. He is listed as having been born in 1856 in Mississippi, single, and a laborer. What is presumably the same James Black in the 1910 census lists him as living in Yuma, Arizona, and his

²⁷ Maurice Kildare (Gladwell Richardson), “Mormon Jim Black’s Missing Gold,” *True Treasure*, 7:10 (October 1973): 30–36.

occupation as miner. Early Escalante, Utah, resident Jess Barker said that Black “came from Colorado.”²⁸ William H. Switzer later also stated that Black was from Durango, Colorado.²⁹ This, however, probably does not mean that he was born there, but that he came from there to Arizona.

Black in his 1930 statements said that he came to the Flagstaff area in August 1880 from Lee’s Ferry on the Colorado River. There he had been hired as a drover by John W. Young to help in driving a herd of horses from southern Utah to near the San Francisco Peaks. By 1883 he was working as a cowhand for Young’s Mormon church-owned A 1 cattle outfit in Fort Valley, several miles northwest of Flagstaff. Charles H. Spencer, involved in mining schemes on the upper Paria River, at Lee’s Ferry, and at Warm Creek in Glen Canyon, remembered Jim Black as “An A 1 cowpuncher who did a lot of prospecting at times and made the remark that the scenery where the San Juan and Colorado [Rivers] meet would make a good tourist attraction.”³⁰

Following is an abridgement of Black’s statements. However, it is first imperative to note that his dates are from one to three years too early. This should not be too surprising since Black was giving his statements thirty-five years after the events took place. (This discrepancy is based on his 1889 date for the beginning of the San Juan gold rush, which in actuality started in the latter part of 1892, and the chronological sequence of his dates thereafter.) For both accuracy and ease of reading the corrected year dates are placed within brackets.

Sometime in 1889 [1892] J. P. Williams, who had a small ranch and trading post at Blue Canyon, discovered gold on the San Juan river. This was west of Bluff....

I had just come out of the Navajo Mountain country to Flagstaff when this excitement broke. It was called the “San Juan excitement.” Hugh Campbell [and I] got John Woody, John Towler and Bob Ferguson to... go to the San Juan country with us. We outfitted in June of 1890 [1892], and with nine packed mules we set out for the north through the Indian country.

On reaching the San Juan we made camp near the Williams diggings.... It was principally on a sand bar in the river that was then called “Williams Bar.”

After prospecting both sides of the San Juan in the vicinity of the Williams diggings we could find nothing more than flour gold....

Late in November that year [1892]... we decided to call it quits for prospecting... I decided to winter in Bluff City, Utah.

In Bluff City that winter I heard about the big arch in stone that is today called Rainbow Natural Bridge.... I heard stories about it from a number of Mormons who had been told about it by Ute Indians.

The next spring [1893]... I went back to the Williams diggings, holding up there about a week. Old man J. P. Williams told me that he had been to the natural bridge in

²⁸ Jess Barker to Otis R. Marston, November 19, 1955, Otis R. Marston Collection, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

²⁹ William H. Switzer statement, Gladwell Richardson Collection, AHSND. Contained in a letter from Bonnie J. Greer, of the society to Stan Jones, May 30, 1984. Copy in author’s possession.

³⁰ Muriel Spencer Pope to Otis Marston, May 31, 1957, Otis R. Marston Collection, The Huntington Library.

1884 and that it was no great shakes. [Williams' two sons] Billy and Ben were more interested in the bridge though, and they described the country around it and how I could get in there....

At the Williams diggings I teamed up with Bob Sommers and we prospected down the San Juan again, and then north along the east side of the Colorado river. We went as far as Dandy Crossing [Hite, Utah] on the upper Colorado river, and came across Cass Hite....

Cass Hite told me more about the natural bridge, and that he had been to it back in the 1880s while seeking the "lost" Merrick-Mitchell mine.

Having to go out to Bluff City for supplies, I did so and came across Al Brown and George McDowell.... They wanted to throw in with me....

Sometime in January [1894], probably around the 20th, we decided to quit... the San Juan and moved through the flat country towards Navajo mountain....

We gradually worked up it onto the top from the eastern most point. We moved from there to Lookout Ridge and it was from this place that we could look down into what is now called Bridge canyon....

Brown, McDowell and I climbed off the mountain into what was then known as Broken Leg Canyon. We then followed through into Under-the-Arm Canyon to the natural bridge.

You [Richardson] ask about names on the bridge. I cannot recall them all, only a few. There must have been more than thirty all together. They were cut in the base of the free end of the bridge, and on the surface of the rock wall of the creek, and back on the cliff behind the bridge.

I distinctly remember the Williams' names, or initials, because I had already run across them elsewhere in canyons and around Navajo mountain, and Bill and Ben told me about cutting their names on the bridge....

The best I can recollect after seeing the inscriptions a number of times later on, the following were on the bridge base or close by: Ed. Randolph, W. A. Ross, Geo. Emerson, M. N. Wydel, Joe Ashblock, Montgomery, Craig, C. W. Wright, S. Jones, W. E. Mitchell, A. G. Turner, G. E. Choistila, W. Brockway, M. C. Young, J. E. H., and Cade.

I remember most of these names only because those men were known to me.... Billy Ross.... Carter Wright, Silas Jones, Al Turner, Bill Cade, and Bill Brockway.

The W. E. Mitchell inscription was the oldest.... With Mitchell's name was an 1861 date....

Our time was limited by our food supply, so we came out on what is known as the East Trail, a real good trail that had been used by the Indians for years and years.

That canyon, Under-the-Arm, or Bridge Canyon, interested me so the next year, 1893 [1895], I got Benton Gibson to go back in with me. We went down Oak Canyon, crossed over and took the East Trail past Glass Mountain into the natural bridge.

Wanting to prospect that side of the Colorado river canyon we came out of Under-the-Arm... and swung back around Glass mountain.

Between where what is called now Forbidding Canyon, and... Oak canyon, the Colorado river makes a bend. We entered there, in a kind of basin with good grass and water. Here we prospected for two months before pulling out to Escalante, Utah. We swam our horses over and took up the Escalante river to the small Mormon town.

During the winter of 1894-95 [1895-96], in order to get another grub stake I agreed to winter two hundred head of horses for some people at Escalante. Gibson joined me in this undertaking and we swam the horses across the river and put them into the basin in the river bend. They did well in there while we prospected out from the basin. The basin was afterwards called "Jim Black's Basin."

In prospecting away from it we even made a trail over the canyon wall into Aztec near the mouth where there are some cliff ruins. Cleaning out one large room, we

camped in it and did our cooking. While in Aztec that winter we both went to the natural bridge several times.³¹

The first person to publish anything in any sort of detail about the Black statements was Stephen Jett in his 1992 *Kiva* article. However, as he did with the Williams statement, Jett only presented the facts put forth by Black and did not raise any questions or concerns as to their reliability or validity. On the other hand, Hank Hassell, in his 1999 book, does bring up several points that troubled him.

The first was the use of Redbud Pass, which Black said was crossed between Broken Leg and Under-the-Arm canyons to reach Rainbow Natural Bridge. The problem with Redbud Pass was discussed in the Williams statement. Another point also covered previously with the Williams statement was Black's finding of "more than thirty names" at the bridge, while the 1909 Cummings-Douglass party found none.

However, two new points in connection with names are raised by Hassell. One involved Black's remembering "the Williams' names, or initials... and [that] Bill and Ben [Williams] told me about cutting their names on the bridge..." Hassell correctly points out that in Bill Williams' statement he categorically says, "We did not cut our names on the base of the bridge." The other point was the Williams claim of seeing Jim Black's name cut on Rainbow Bridge in 1884-85. Black, however, in his statements, indicates that he did not visit the bridge until 1892 (1894).³²

Hassell also questions Black's statement that he talked with Cass Hite about Rainbow Bridge, and that Hite told him that "he had been to it back in the 1880s." If this was true, why would Hite, following the 1909 discovery and responding to an inquiry from Byron Cummings, state, "No, I did not see the bridge you sent me the picture..." Hassell also takes issue with Black's "East Trail" and his describing it as "a real good trail that had been used by the Indians for years and years."³³ Hassell notes that there was no trail there in 1909 less than twenty years later. Finally, Hassell brings up Black's statement that he had heard about Rainbow Bridge from the Mormon residents of the little town of Bluff, Utah, on the San Juan River. However, no one else who left any written records and who was in contact with these same townspeople during this time was ever told about the bridge.³⁴

As with the Williams statement, those of James W. Black are, for the most part, accounts of his various prospecting trips in the San Juan-Navajo Mountain region. Unlike Williams', however, Black's statement is longer and covers several years rather than just a few months. After adjusting the year dates, much of his information can be backed up and corroborated

³¹ James W. Black, "Statement."

³² Hassell, *Rainbow Bridge*, 63-64.

³³ *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

with contemporary records and testimonies of people who knew him.

Black's statement that he had "just come out of the Navajo mountain country when this [San Juan] excitement broke," is verified by a brief item that appeared in Flagstaff's *The Coconino Sun* on June 30, 1892. "James W. Black returned this week from the country northeast of here... in search of the 'Lost Spanish Mine' [the Merrick-Mitchell, or Pish-la-ki]. But after searching for the lost mine two weeks through the rocky canyons... [he was] forced to abandon [his] search..."³⁵

Black's naming of Hugh Campbell, John Woody, and John Towler as partners in his 1892 trip "north through the Indian country" is backed by a mining claim dated December 29 of that year. Filed in Monticello, Utah, San Juan County seat, the document is for a claim "situated about fifty miles southwest of Bluff City, and one-half mile east of Sierra Capitan Peak." Campbell, Woody, and Towler, along with Black, are all listed as "locators."³⁶

However, based on the June 30 *Coconino Sun* article a June outfitting date would be too early for the San Juan trip. But after thirty-eight years perhaps Black was remembering outfitting for his June Navajo Mountain venture instead. So, too, does the date of the mining claim seem to refute Black's contention that it was "late in November" when they decided to call it quits for prospecting.

Once at Rainbow Bridge, and as pointed out by Hank Hassell, Black recalled seeing many names there. Besides those of the Williamses, he listed sixteen others. A few were the same as those reported by Bill Williams, but there were several additional names. Some of these Black gave only initials but later provided full first names. W. E. Mitchell, G. E. Choistila, William Brockway, M. C. Young, J. E. H., and Bill Cade were all names that Gladwell Richardson had seen and copied down at Inscription House ruin in Navajo Canyon in 1928.

It seems very likely that most, if not all, of these names that Black "recollected" were actually supplied by Richardson. That this possibility is a near certainty is borne out by the use of the initials "W. E." with Mitchell and "M. C." with Young. The 1861 Mitchell inscription was left by William C. Mitchell, a member of the 1861 Mormon party led by Jacob Hamblin to recover the body of the recently slain George A. Smith, Jr.³⁷ In Mitchell's inscription the "C" has a small, horizontal bar through it, a fairly common way of printing a capital letter C in the 1800s. It is apparent to see why Richardson may have misread it for a capital letter E.

Black's, or Richardson's, M. C. Young was actually left in 1882 by Notley

³⁵ *The Coconino Sun* (Flagstaff, Arizona), "Items," June 30, 1892.

³⁶ San Juan County, Utah, "Mining Claims, Miscellaneous Book A" p. 61, County Recorder's Office, Monticello.

³⁷ Albert E. Ward, *Inscription House: Two Research Reports* (Flagstaff: Northern Arizona Society of Science and Art, 1975), 11.



C. Young, who was a member of a prospecting expedition searching for the lost Merrick-Mitchell silver mine.³⁸ His capital letter “N” at Inscription House has a curved flourish at the beginning which makes it look very much like an M.

The lower drainage of Forbidding Canyon with the mouth of Aztec Creek and the Colorado River at the lower right.

Another name listed by Black was that of C. W. Wright, whom he later names as Carter. While there is no Carter W. Wright in the mining records of the Glen Canyon region, there is a George M. Wright, a prospector, who in the early 1890s, left his name and the date at several locations throughout Glen Canyon, including at the mouth of Forbidding Canyon. In each instance he left only the initials of his first and middle names, G. M., and in each case his way of carving these initials looks much like C. W.

Then there is the name A. G., or Al Turner. Alonzo G. Turner was also a Glen Canyon prospector during the latter part of the 1890s and early 1900s. He, too, left his first two initials, his surname Turner, and the date at several places along the Colorado River. However, he was always known as “Lon,” never “Al.” Again, it seems very likely that these names, recollected by Black, were actually supplied by Gladwell Richardson.

On Black’s second trip to Rainbow Bridge, he recalled that he and his partner traveled down Oak Canyon, then crossed over and took the trail past Glass Mountain, coming out of Under-the-Arm Canyon (present-day Bridge Canyon) and then swung back around Glass Mountain to Oak Canyon. Either Black was confused thirty-five years later, or his Oak Canyon is some other Oak Canyon. The so-called Glass Mountain, or Mountains, are a series of sandstone domes on the east side of Nasja

³⁸ “Gone to the Navajo Mountain,” *The Durango Record*, January 20, 1882, and *The Rocky Mountain News*, April 14, 1882.

Canyon and were so named by famous Western author Zane Grey when he went in to Rainbow Bridge in 1913. They are several miles to the east of Oak Canyon, and coming in by Black's "East Trail," they would have been encountered well before Oak Canyon. Leaving Rainbow Bridge, of course, just the opposite would be true. They are several miles to the east of Oak Canyon, not between Bridge Canyon and Oak.

"Jim Black's Basin," according to James Black's own description, was probably a short distance up Oak Canyon from the Colorado River. Oak Canyon prior to Lake Powell made a large sweeping turn from its mouth back toward the west, almost encircling a tall rock mass. Before looping back south once again, this bend nearly cut its way back to the Colorado, a thin blade of sandstone wall just a score of yards in width separating the two streams. The comparatively low area fanning out to the southeast from this meander of Oak Canyon was most likely the basin described by Black.

Black says that they prospected the area for two months before leaving. Possibly substantiating this claim years later, Charles Kelly, whose river parties in 1938 and 1942 both camped at the mouth of Oak Canyon, said there was a Black inscription "a mile or two up Oak Canyon."³⁹ This would have been within the so-called "Jim Black's Basin."

The following year, again with the same partner, Black returned to the basin. This time they prospected out away from the basin, making a trail over the canyon wall from Oak into Bridge Canyon, the lower part of present-day Forbidding Canyon. Here they made camp in the "cliff ruin" near the mouth of Bridge Canyon. They were unable to travel directly along the bank of the Colorado River from the mouth of Oak Canyon to that of nearby Forbidding Canyon. In this relatively short stretch, the Colorado makes a bend from south to west, sweeping hard against the bordering canyon wall leaving no room for passage on foot. Black adds that during this winter they both went to Rainbow Bridge several times.

Black's 1930 statements corroborated this in several ways. First, there is, in fact, an old trail identified as "prehistoric" by members of the Lake Powell Research Project in the mid-1970s.⁴⁰ Before the filling of Lake Powell the old trail ascended by way of some pecked steps from the floor of Oak Canyon, across the intervening sandstone ridge for a few hundred yards, and then down to near the mouth of Forbidding Canyon. This very well may have been the trail that Black said they "made." In actuality, they probably simply improved upon the old Anasazi trail.

Secondly, there are four man-made walls that were found just inside the mouth of Forbidding Canyon. Archeologists suggest that while they may

³⁹ Charles Kelly to Otis R. "Dock" Marston, May 14, 1952. Otis R. Marston Collection, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

⁴⁰ N. B. Pattison and L. D. Potter, *Prehistoric and Historic Steps and Trails of Glen Canyon-Lake Powell*, Lake Powell Research Project Bulletin No. 45 (Los Angeles: National Science Foundation, September 1977), 44-46.

very well have been prehistoric in origin, they were probably modified by later visitors. When a few members of the Cummings-Douglass party followed down the canyon to its junction with the Colorado River, they, too, saw the ruins. Neil Judd, a member of the Cummings-Douglass party, wrote, "Just within the mouth of Bridge Canyon [Forbidding Canyon], under the overhanging north wall, is a dilapidated cliff-dwelling, re-occupied by later gold seekers. Abandoned miner's tools and camp equipment littered the cave in 1909."⁴¹



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A companion of Judd's, Donald Beauregard, added, "We found three names scratched with charcoal above the ruins...." One of the names was "Jas. Black Feb [unreadable]."⁴² Just when this was first recorded has, unfortunately, been obscured by a later inscription.

This photograph taken in Winslow, Arizona, about 1890 shows Jonathan Patterson Williams, seated, and William F. Williams standing in the back on the left of the photo.

It was undoubtedly these ruins that led Black, in his notarized statement of September 27, to say that "Bridge Canyon at that time had no name. We named it Aztec Canyon."⁴³

To avoid any confusion, a word must be said here concerning place names. The Glen Canyon tributary extending to the south, and whose three principal eastern tributaries, drain the west side of Navajo Mountain, is labeled as Forbidding Canyon on the U. S. Geological Survey map of the area. The stream draining the canyon is shown as Aztec Creek. Explorer and traveler Charles L. Bernheimer of New York City named Forbidding Canyon in 1922. The name Aztec Creek seems to have first been used by a U. S. G. S. river survey in 1921, though Aztec Rapid, identified as the

⁴¹ Neil M. Judd, "The Discovery of Rainbow Bridge," *National Parks Bulletin*, November 1927, 10.

⁴² Beauregard, *Deseret Evening News*, October 2, 1909.

⁴³ James W. Black, "Statement." In the 1800s it was commonly, though incorrectly, supposed that the various prehistoric ruins throughout the American Southwest were the work of the Aztec civilization found by the early Spanish explorers in Mexico.

turbulent water at the mouth of the stream and canyon, was already in use by the late 1890s.

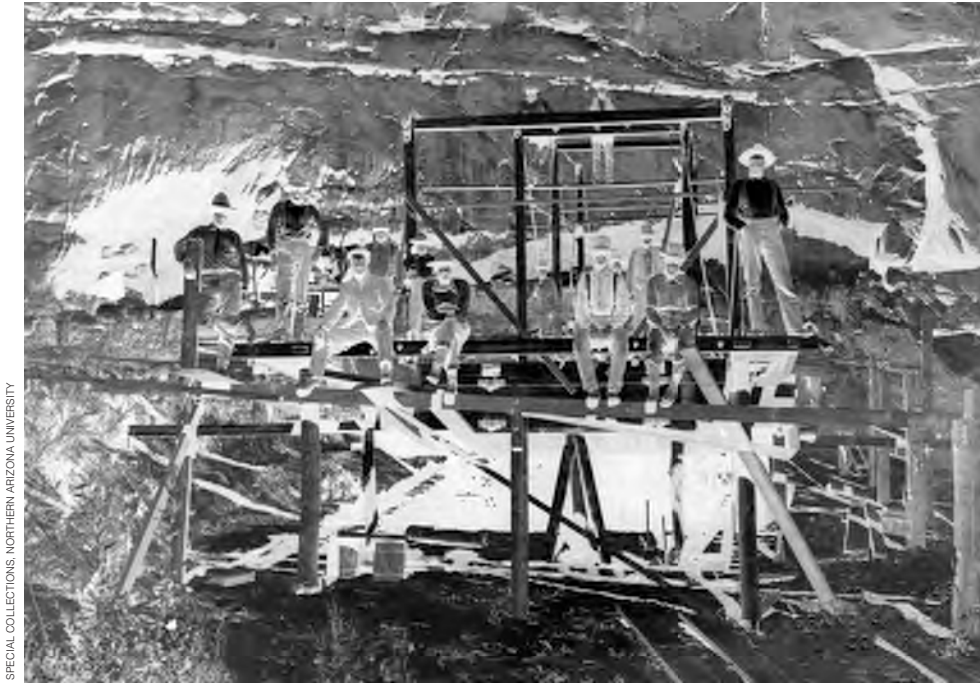
The eastern branch of Forbidding Canyon that contains the natural rock span of Rainbow Bridge is shown on the modern U. S. G. S. map as Rainbow Bridge Canyon. This full appellation first appeared on the Geological Survey's 15 minute quadrangle map in 1953. But before 1953 it was known simply as Bridge Canyon on the 1923 Geological Survey river map sheet F. However, beginning with the 1909 Cummings-Douglass expedition, the name Bridge Canyon applied not only to the eastern fork, but also to the final two or three miles of what is now Forbidding Canyon to its confluence with Glen Canyon. Therefore, when Black stated that Bridge Canyon at that time had no name, he was referring to present-day Forbidding Canyon.

A final point to consider concerning the reliability of the 1930 Black statements is his contention that after their first prospecting venture in the Jim Black Basin area, he and his partner "pulled out to Escalante, Utah," swam their horses across the Colorado River, and followed up the Escalante River to the small Mormon town. The following winter they then returned to the basin once again with a herd of horses to pasture there for some of the people at Escalante. A person cannot simply cross the Colorado River from Oak Canyon and "take up the Escalante River," the mouths of those two Colorado tributaries being some seventeen river-miles apart from one another. Because of the meandering course of the Colorado, the often times sheer cliffs, and the blocking gorges of deep tributary canyons, it was impossible to travel by horseback from one to the other along the river bank.

However, Black and his fellow prospector could have easily forded the Colorado River from the rock delta at the mouth of Oak Canyon, angling not more than a quarter of a mile to the nearly opposite delta of what is shown on today's U. S. G. S. map as Navajo Valley, the old Glen Canyon river-runners' Twilight Canyon. This drainage did provide a difficult but passable route up and onto the Escalante Desert around the end of the Kaiparowits Plateau, and an open way to the northwest to the town of Escalante. These latter miles paralleled the Escalante River, but did not, as Black implied, follow that stream itself.

Besides his 1894 prospecting trip to Navajo Mountain, Black, as part of his July 11 statement, said that "a couple of years later," meaning from 1897, he again went back into the Navajo Mountain country. This seems to be borne out by geologist Herbert E. Gregory in 1913. In his field notes while at the summit of Navajo Mountain, he wrote, "Mark on tip top stake... Jas Black Jan. (?) 1903."⁴⁴ This was echoed by writer Elmer E. Davis in 1926 when he said, "Carved into a piece of wood, a portion of a tree

⁴⁴ Herbert E. Gregory, "Navajo-Moki, Book VIII," entry for June 18, 1913. U. S. Geological Survey Library, Denver, Colorado.



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limb, is Jas Black Jan 1903.”⁴⁵

Here ends Black’s own statements about his prospecting ventures in the San Juan-Navajo Mountain region. What little is known about his life afterwards comes to us from the ubiquitous Gladwell Richardson. In 1910 and 1911, Black worked for Charles H. Spencer in his mining projects at Lee’s Ferry and Warm Creek Canyon. Black finally left Flagstaff in 1931 and relocated in Phoenix, where he died at the age of eighty-three.⁴⁶

Unlike the statements of W. F. Williams and James W. Black, whose claims found print, albeit briefly, the third claim of prospectors seeing Rainbow Bridge before 1909 has never been published in any form. This claim is contained in an interview conducted by Utah writer and newspaper-woman Pearl Baker in 1959. A typescript copy of that part of the interview is a single page in the massive collection of Colorado River historian Otis R. “Dock” Marston at The Huntington Library in San Marino, California. The interviewee was former Glen Canyon prospector Louis M. Chaffin, who, while not making the claim for himself, stated that two of his prospecting companions did see Rainbow Bridge, probably in 1898.

Louis Chaffin was born in 1874 in Beaver, Utah. According to his own

This photograph of the construction of the Charles H. Spencer steamboat at the mouth of Warm Creek and the Colorado River taken in 1911 shows James W. Black sitting, second from the left.

⁴⁵ Elmer E. Davis, “The Rainbow Natural Bridge,” *Progressive Arizona*, July 1926.

⁴⁶ Kildare, *True Treasure*, 36.

testimony in the so-called “River Bed Case” between the United States and the State of Utah (1929-30), Chaffin began prospecting on the Colorado River in 1892. He was on the river “pretty continuously” from 1893 until 1908 and then “off and on occasionally” up until 1912. During these years Chaffin lived in the town of Loa, Wayne County, Utah. In the 1930s he moved to Payson, Utah, where he died in 1962.

Chaffin in his interview concerning the sighting of Rainbow Bridge stated:

One Sunday while we were working the Klondike bar, Lige Maxwell, Bije Blackburn and I went up on top to get a beef and Billy Hay and George Little, catching a nice wind, sailed up to the mouth of a canyon [Forbidding Canyon] that headed up in Navajo Mountain, to prospect for gold. This canyon was about six or seven miles [sic] above the Klondike. They had a shovel, pick, and gold pan and a lunch with them. Billy had poor feet, had fallen arches, and he walked up the canyon to Rainbow Bridge, but got sore footed and disgusted because they didn't find a bit of gold, so he came back down. He got into the boat and came on back to camp.

George Little laid out over night at the bridge, prospected around some more, and came on back the next day (Monday). He tied a couple of cottonwood logs together with a space between them, sat on a crosspiece with his feet in the river between the logs, and using the shovel for an oar, floated on down to the Klondike. It was late in the evening when he got to the bar, and he hollered and hollered when he saw he couldn't pull that raft in and land it. The fellows went out in a boat and got him.

Billy and George described the Bridge and wanted us to go up and see it. Billy said there were big flat places on the ends to write our names, but didn't say there were any other names there, or that he or Little wrote theirs.

I wanted to go up and see the Bridge, but we never did get a wind at the right time, and I didn't get around to it.⁴⁷

Some of the facts presented in Chaffin's interview can be readily verified by mining records. Klondike Bar was one of the more extensive gold mining locations along the Colorado River in Glen Canyon. The bar extended along the right or west bank of the river from Mile 65 to Mile 66.5. This is downstream only about five and a half miles below the mouth of Forbidding Canyon, actually less than the “six or seven miles” estimated by Chaffin.

Louis M. Chaffin, Seth Longee [or Laugee], and William B. Hay made the first mining claim on the bar on December 22, 1897. They named their discovery the Clondike [sic] Placer Mining Claim, evidently commemorating the gold rush in Canada's Yukon Territory, which was taking place at the same time.⁴⁸ The trio sold out their interests in the claim by the middle of February in 1899. This, then, would warrant a date of sometime in 1898 for the visit to Rainbow Bridge.

William B. “Billy” Hay was born in 1865 in Cork County, Ireland, and immigrated to the United States in 1886. He spent many years in the Glen Canyon country, and was interested in mining activities around the Henry Mountains and along the Colorado River. In 1895, Hay, Louis Chaffin, and two others located a gold placer on what came to be known as Moqui Bar,

⁴⁷ Louis M. Chaffin, interview by Pearl Baker, March 13, 1959, Otis R. Marston Collection.

⁴⁸ Mining Claim Location Notices, Book 1, p. 80, County Recorder's Office, Kanab, Utah.

located on the east bank of the river across from and just below the mouth of Hansen Creek.⁴⁹ On the cliff wall bordering Smith Bar at the mouth of Hansen Creek were many old names and dates, including that of “Billy Hay.”

During the summer of 1900, Hay worked on the Stanton gold mining dredge in Glen Canyon. In the 1910 U. S. Federal Census for Utah, he is listed as single, a prospector/miner, and was boarding with the Franz Weber family in the little community of Giles in Wayne County. Hay died in 1942 and is buried in the Hanksville cemetery.

Not much is known about George M. Little beyond the brief information contained in the 1900 census. He is listed as being born in 1858 in Ohio. In 1900 he was living in Teasdale, Utah, and was married with one son. His occupation was given as day laborer.

Little’s name is not among the locators of the Klondike Bar claim, and he, Maxwell, and Blackburn were evidently hired on as laborers as the 1900 census indicates rather than being any type of co-owners. All three were residents and neighbors in western Wayne County; Little’s hometown of Teasdale is only a few miles from Louis Chaffin’s hometown at Loa.

As with Williams and Black’s claim, the claim of Hay and Little seeing Rainbow Bridge in the late 1890s is questionable since it was given so long after the fact, over sixty years later. It would seem that either Chaffin or Hay would have mentioned the visit some time before Hay’s death in 1942 or during Chaffin’s interview in 1959. Both spent the remainder of their lives in southern Utah and both were undoubtedly familiar with the 1909 discovery expedition of Cummings and Douglass. Yet the story in the interview by Pearl Baker remains the sole reference to the possible 1898 sighting of Rainbow Bridge.

The most enigmatic claim of a prospector seeing Rainbow Bridge prior to Cummings and Douglass is also the latest to come to light. Unfortunately, no details of the sighting are given, and it is not even known who actually made the claim or exactly when. The only two things known



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Photograph of William B. “Billy” Hay in later years taken in Hanksville.

⁴⁹ Crampton, *Historical Sites in Glen Canyon, Mouth of Hansen Creek to Mouth of San Juan River*, Anthropological Paper No. 61 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, December 1962), 74.

with any certainty are the name F. H. Owens and a decade date of “the nineties,” meaning the 1890s.

In 2000, archeologist Andrew L. Christenson of Prescott, Arizona, purchased a “Discard” copy of Charles L. Bernheimer’s book *Rainbow Bridge* at a Phoenix Public Library sale.⁵⁰ In it he found on page five, opposite a photograph of Rainbow Bridge, part of the text underlined in pencil: “... in 1909, while guiding Professor Byron Cummings and Surveyor William B. Douglas [sic], he [John Wetherill] discovered the Bridge.” The underline extended off into the right-side margin of the page with an arrow pointing to a penciled notation, “My Grandfather, F. H. Owens, Discovered It In The Nineties.”

It is impossible to say who printed this historically tantalizing statement and when. The Bernheimer book is the 1929 edition, and a small stamp near the bottom of the title page indicates that it was acquired by the city library on “Feb 5 1936.” The identity of F. H. Owens has now been made with a reasonable amount of certainty.

In the 1900 U. S. Federal Census for Arizona there is only one Owens with the initials F. H. and that is Franklin H. Owens. In that year he was living in the small town of Woodruff, Arizona, on the upper Little Colorado River. At that time he was nineteen years old and listed as “At school.” By 1910 he was married and living in Holbrook, Arizona, and was a “clerk/general merc.” In both 1920 and 1930, the last federal census record open for public scrutiny, Franklin was a resident of Phoenix. His only son with two grandsons, were also residing in Phoenix in 1930.

Franklin Owens was born in 1881 in Woodruff. His parents were Mormon emigrants from Utah, who, sometime in the 1870s settled along the Little Colorado River in northern Arizona. Presumably, the elder Owens and his teenage son made at least one foray northward to the Colorado-San Juan River country, probably during the prospecting excitement of the 1890s. Or perhaps the younger Owens accompanied some other group. If he did, in fact, see Rainbow Bridge, it would have logically been on such an expedition, and, due to his age, more than likely in the late 1890s.

Two other facts have come to light over the years that could be used as possible circumstantial evidence for early sightings of Rainbow Bridge. The first was by writers Harvey Leake and Gary Topping in 1987. They pointed out that the “somewhat inaccurate” 1892 U. S. Geological Survey topographic reconnaissance sheet of Marsh Pass, Arizona, shows a trail in the general vicinity of today’s Cliff Canyon. They suggested that it was possible that members of the survey party, during their 1883-84 fieldwork, utilized the trail.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Charles L. Bernheimer, *Rainbow Bridge: Circling Navajo Mountain and Explorations in the “Badlands” of Southern Utah and Northern Arizona* (Garden City and New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929).

⁵¹ Harvey Leake and Gary Topping, “The Bernheimer Explorations in Forbidding Canyon,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 55 (Spring 1987):161, footnote 38.



The William B. Douglass Party in Paiute Canyon, 1909, after their visit to Rainbow Bridge.

In 1992, writer Stephen C. Jett observed that the 1892 Henry Mountains, Utah, U.S.G.S. reconnaissance sheet, which borders the Marsh Pass sheet, was surveyed in 1884, and shows a canyon reaching the Colorado River from the south. Not only was this canyon in the correct location for present-day Forbidding Canyon, it also had an eastern tributary branch corresponding to Rainbow Bridge Canyon. Jett advanced the possibility that “perhaps this is based on information obtained from prospectors.”⁵²

However, as to any of the four prospector claimants actually seeing Rainbow Bridge in the 1880s and 1890s, the following must be kept in mind. All four claims were made many years after the fact. All were made following the discovery by the 1909 Cummings–Douglass expedition. No inscriptions of names or dates prior to the Cummings–Douglass expedition have been found in Rainbow Bridge Canyon itself. There are no contemporary accounts such as newspaper stories or dated journals that describe or mention Rainbow Bridge. Finally, though it would have been surprising, indeed, for nineteenth century prospectors to have carried any sort of camera with them, the fact remains that there are no known dated photographs of Rainbow Bridge before 1909.

Is it possible that Rainbow Bridge was seen by prospectors previous to 1909? Certainly. Is it probable? Yes. But is there any incontrovertible proof? No. Unless and until some kind of concrete evidence is found, we must for historical accuracy abide by Cass Hite’s 1910 pronouncement to Byron Cummings: “The bridge found near Navajo Mountain is located in about the only spot in that region that I did not explore or prospect. No, I did not see the bridge that you sent me the picture of, and I don’t think any white man ever saw it until your party did.”⁵³

⁵² Jett, “The Great Race to Discover Rainbow Natural Bridge,” 45.

⁵³ Byron Cummings, “The Great Natural Bridges of Utah,” *Bulletin of the University of Utah*, 3:3 Part 1 (November 1910): 17-18.