

*Charles L. Bernheimer writing his field notes, 1923.
USHS collections.*

The Bernheimer Explorations in Forbidding Canyon

BY HARVEY LEAKE AND GARY TOPPING

THE RAINBOW PLATEAU REGION SOUTH OF Glen Canyon was one of the last areas in the lower forty-eight states to be systematically ex-

Mr. Leake, an electrical engineer in southern California, is a great-grandson of John Wetherill; Dr. Topping is curator of manuscripts in the Utah State Historical Society Library.

plored. Extremely rugged and isolated, it was neglected by the great federal surveys of the late nineteenth century which brought most of the Colorado Plateau into public knowledge. Geologist Herbert E. Gregory, who named the Rainbow Plateau and conducted several expeditions into the area, called it

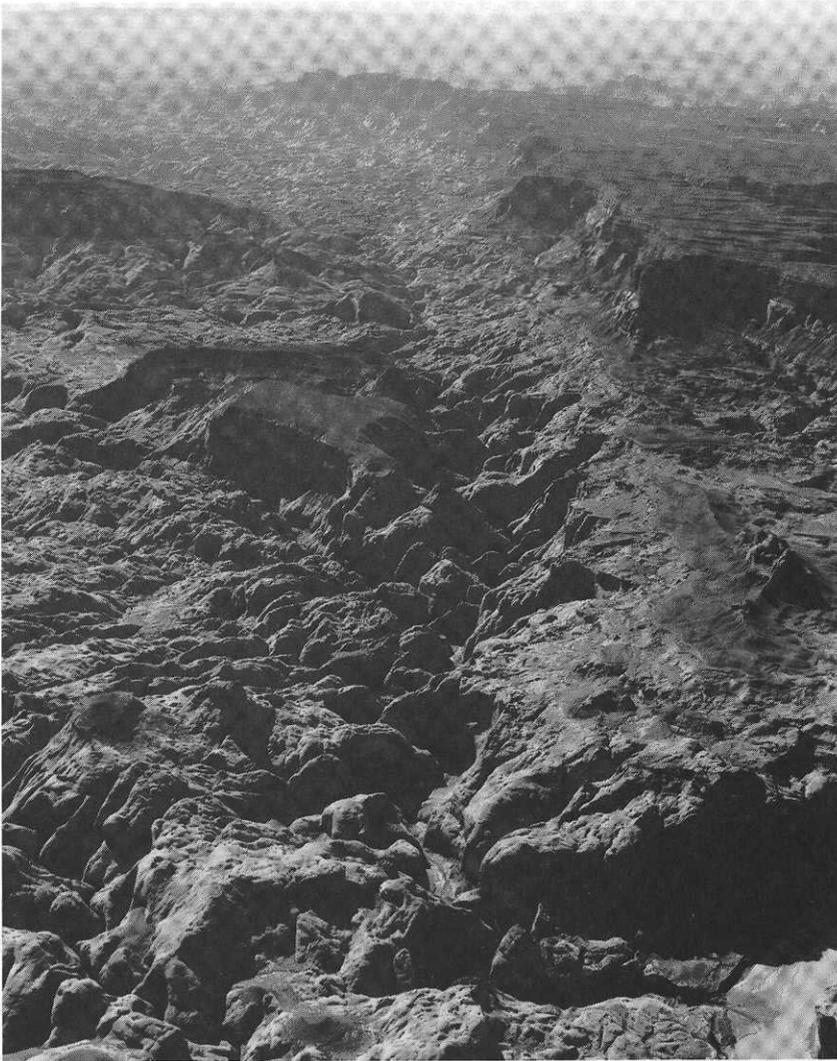
the most inaccessible, least known, and roughest portion of the Navajo Reservation. . . . The deep canyon trenches are practically impassable and the buttresses flanking the cathedral spires are so narrow, smooth, and rounded that passage from one to another and access to the capping mesas have so far not been attained. Whether the ancient cliff dwellers made use of these mesa tops is yet undetermined. . . . The experience of my party indicates that exploration in this canyoned land may be accompanied by hardships.¹

The deep and circuitous Forbidding Canyon nearly bisects the Rainbow Plateau. Its sculptor, Aztec Creek, flows northerly to the Colorado River, dividing the Navajo Mountain country to the east from Cummings Mesa to the west. Abrupt sandstone walls dominate the scenery along the length of the canyon, making it nearly inaccessible. Drop-offs and quicksand in the creekbed further discourage human intrusion.

The most famous of Forbidding Canyon's tributaries is Rainbow Bridge Canyon. Hidden from public knowledge until 1909, Rainbow Bridge was soon publicized by enthusiastic visitors such as Zane Grey and Theodore Roosevelt. Their popular accounts accentuated the mystique of the uncivilized Navajo Mountain region and extolled its scenic potential. There were few, however, who could afford the substantial effort, time, and money required to make the long trip to Rainbow Bridge despite the availability of commercial pack trips. In the decade following its discovery fewer than two hundred visitors signed the register at the arch.

A few of those who did make the trip included in their itinerary the narrow five-mile defile between the arch and the Colorado River, but there is no record that any of the early tourists explored Forbidding Canyon above its junction with Rainbow Bridge Canyon. That venture was the goal of the 1921 and 1922 expeditions of Charles L. Bernheimer, a goal that proved so elusive in its achievement that members of the 1922 party elected to change the very name of the canyon,

¹Herbert E. Gregory, *The Navajo Country* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916), USGS Water Supply Paper 380, pp. 44-45.



Aerial view of Aztec Creek, looking upstream, and Forbidding Canyon. Rainbow Bridge would be to left of mesa in upper center. U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, photograph.

originally known blandly as “West Canyon,” to the more descriptive “Forbidding Canyon.”²

Of all those who ventured forth into the canyon country by pack train, surely none was as improbable as Charles Leopold Bernheimer (1864-1944). Utterly unqualified by heritage, training, or physique for geographical and archaeological investigations in the harsh climate and terrain of the desert Southwest, Bernheimer nevertheless made fifteen

²Charles L. Bernheimer, *Rainbow Bridge: Circling Navajo Mountain and Explorations in the “Bad Lands” of Southern Utah and Northern Arizona* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1924), p. 96.

such expeditions during the period 1915-36. The wild horses of Bernheimer's imagination fed upon the novels of Zane Grey and drew him again and again to the slickrock country where the eastern urbanite, who was at home in congressional hearing rooms and the drawing rooms of New York's most wealthy and powerful classes, became equally at home beside a lonely desert campfire. Several of the Bernheimer expeditions reported previously undiscovered geographical features and collected important archaeological artifacts under the auspices of the American Museum of Natural History and other institutions of which he was an important benefactor.

Bernheimer, a German Jew, was born at Ulm-on-Danube, Wurttemberg, and educated in Geneva. He came to the United States in 1881 to work in New York City as an office boy in the cotton cloth wholesaling business of his uncle Adolph. Through the years, Bernheimer rose steadily in the organization, serving as its president during 1907-28 and thereafter as chairman of the board of directors. The civic-minded Bernheimer was an active Republican and achieved an international reputation as a leader in commercial arbitration. Though he scorned a newspaper article that referred to him as a multimillionaire, he became a very wealthy man only to lose most of it during the Great Depression of the 1930s.³

Bernheimer's marriage in 1893 to Clara Silbermann, daughter of Jacob Silbermann, a New York silk manufacturer, was an event of the highest significance in his life, for she was his true supporter and the marriage was a love match of the deepest order. Though she was unable to brave the rigors of desert life and join her husband on his southwestern expeditions, she understood the pull the desert had on him and encouraged him to follow his desires. "Charlie, go and see the Rainbow Bridge as soon as possible," she admonished him; "you won't rest until you have done it." Though he was away from her side and out of communication for periods of a month or more during the summers he spent in the Southwest, she was his constant partner. He telegraphed and wrote to her whenever the rare opportunity presented itself and wrote his field notes in the form of a letter to her. "Dearest Clarchen," the early field notes begin, and other pet names are inter-

³Julius Henry Cohen, *They Buildded Better Than They Knew* (New York: J. Messner, 1946), pp. 149-61; *The National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (New York: James T. White & Co., 1938), vol. E, 1937-38, pp. 196-97; *New York Times*, July 2, 1944; Bernheimer, *Rainbow Bridge*, pp. 28-29. In addition to his book, Bernheimer's major published writings are "Encircling Navajo Mountain with a Pack-Train," *National Geographic* 43 (February 1923): 197-224, and "Cave Treasures of the Lukaichukais," *Touring Topics* 23 (September 1931), unpaginated photographic supplement.

spersed throughout. The ultimate tribute to her was the naming of mesas discovered by him in 1921 for her and their two daughters, Helen and Alice, of Clara S. Bernheimer Natural Bridge, discovered in 1927, and the dedication of his book to her. She died in 1932.⁴

Bernheimer was more than just a wealthy businessman; he was a man of considerable culture as well. His literary skill is amply demonstrated in his book, his articles, and his field notes, where he shows a fine ear for the nuances of the language in his depiction of the rigors of the trail and the beauties of the desert vistas, as well as for the intricacies of the personalities of his colleagues. He was an artist of considerable skill. He mentions carrying a sketchbook in which he frequently made pencil drawings of striking geographic features; and his field notes, particularly those of 1929, contain numerous sketches illustrating and supplementing his verbal narrative. Finally, he was a pianist of at least modest skill, who, at the request of a missionary, accompanied the singing at a religious service in Kayenta in 1921. "To my sorrow," he reported, "years of neglect had made my playing rusty, but I agreed to do my best for him." In retrospect, Bernheimer recalled poignantly the religious feeling of the occasion to which his music contributed: "There were gathered Jew and Gentile, Mormon, Quaker, and Polytheist, but all were enraptured by a single thought, each was speaking to his Creator in his own way. On that evening I believe I was lifted more nearly heavenward than ever before."⁵

On his southwestern expeditions Bernheimer was the quintessential tourist whose Kodak recorded everything from the sublime Rainbow Bridge down to the most mundane details of camp life. Like most tourists he spent nearly as much time in front of the camera as behind it, and the dozens of snapshots in which he appears reveal a skinny, sunken-chested little man whose physique contrasts dramatically with the robust cowboys and packers who accompanied him. "If one met him about 1910, and saw his frail body," his colleague Julius Henry Cohen recalled, "one might have said that a man with such physical handicaps could, with good fortune, live to be sixty, but not much beyond that. To live to eighty, was a sheer triumph of spirit over body." Bernheimer exacerbated the handicap of his frail physique with

⁴*The National Cyclopedica*, pp. 196-97; *New York Times*, October 13, 1932; Charles L. Bernheimer, Field Notes (hereafter referred to as CLB Field Notes), May 19, 1920; July 4, 1921, originals in American Museum of Natural History, New York City, copies in Utah State Historical Society Library, Salt Lake City.

⁵Bernheimer, *Rainbow Bridge*, pp. 14, 30-32.

what, to the detached observer, is a nearly hilarious hypochondria. Both his book, *Rainbow Bridge: Circling Navajo Mountain and Explorations in the "Bad Lands" of Southern Utah and Northern Arizona*, and his voluminous field notes record in detail his alcohol rubs, his potions, poultices, and balms through which his obsessive concern for his health manifested itself. His medicine satchel, the contents of which he inventories in an appendix to the book, included such concoctions as Argyrol ("solution for eyes"), Aristol, Ichthyol Salve, and Fraser's Bismuth Sub. No. 2 ("for Dysentery")—surely the most elaborate apothecary ever seen in that country.⁶

Bernheimer dressed like a westerner, though his clothes always seemed too big for his bony frame. He wore the same heavy leather boots and high leggings as his guides, but his English riding breeches added a sartorial touch they lacked. With a loose wool shirt and well-worn campaign hat, his appearance was not radically different from his colleagues. Eastern ways died hard, though, and his book contains a description of the process by which he experimented with different types of high Victorian collars that would enable him to wear a necktie comfortably in the desert heat, only to yield in the end to the popular loose bandana. In his field notes for his 1919 expedition, a brief pack trip with Zeke Johnson into the Natural Bridges in southern Utah, he mentions that one of the pack horses carried his "dress suit case."⁷ The image of Bernheimer dressing for dinner in the wilds of White Canyon lingers in the mind.

Thus the easterner offered much to the ridicule of famously irreverent westerners. Florence and Robert Lister, biographers of Earl Halstead Morris, the archaeologist who accompanied Bernheimer on some of his most important expeditions, report that Bernheimer often regaled his companions around the campfire by reciting page after page of the hyperromantic prose of Zane Grey, whose novels had played a major role in luring him to the canyon country. His red wool skating cap, which he wore to bed on chilly nights, was a source of snickering amusement to the rough-hewn cowboys. And the nauseating aroma of his cheap "Between the Acts" cigars, which he kept properly moistened in a humidor packed with wet sheets of newspaper,

⁶Bernheimer's negatives and albums of photographic prints are in the American Museum of Natural History, New York City; duplicate albums are in the Utah State Historical Society; Cohen, *They Built Better*, p. 150; Bernheimer, *Rainbow Bridge*, pp. 180-82.

⁷Bernheimer, *Rainbow Bridge*, p. 101; see the photograph opposite p. 52, which shows Bernheimer in a necktie at Inscription House; CLB Field Notes, June 28, 1919 (p. 9).

fumigated every trail and campsite. “He smoked the worst kind of five cent cigar you ever heard of,” Cohen recalled:

He nearly killed me in Washington, D.C. during the winter of 1943 and the spring of 1944, staying up until the early hours of the morning while Paul Fitzpatrick (the night owl) and I worked over drafts and memoranda for Senate committee members. . . . through it all, Bernheimer smoked these “stinkadoras,” as I called them. For Christmas I sent him a box of good cigars and suggested that he might smoke them, at least when he was with me in our dissipations. But, these he gave away to friends.⁸

It is noteworthy, then, that Bernheimer actually attracted little or no behind-the-back ridicule on his expeditions; in fact, he was both respected and loved by his associates. Clarence Rogers, who served as a packer on the 1930 expedition to the Lukaichukais, recalls with pleasure Bernheimer’s genteel manners and the old man’s sincere gratitude when Rogers helped him onto his horse: “Thank you, sir, thank you.” When guide Dudy Thomas arrived in Kayenta after one of Bernheimer’s visits in the 1930s, John Wetherill greeted her by saying, “You just missed old Bernheimer. He’s a strange old duck . . . But I like him.”⁹

The remarkable consistency in the personnel of the Bernheimer expeditions, especially the constant presence of the two guides, John Wetherill and Zeke Johnson, could be explained in economic terms: Bernheimer had plenty of money and spent it lavishly on his trips, and Wetherill and Johnson made major parts of their livelihood guiding such people. But there is every reason to believe that they continued to accept his bookings because they enjoyed his company, finding him an easy and appreciative companion in the rough country he loved as intimately and felt as much at home in as they did. And Bernheimer did literally feel at home in the desert: “We camp on the precise spot we did last year,” he wrote to his wife in 1921. “My bed will be on the same precise spot. Does it surprise you then that it feels like a home—indeed like home? I am writing these notes sitting under the same pinion tree under which I wrote you last year.”¹⁰

Part of their liking for Bernheimer resulted from their realization that he understood and admired their hard-won skills in negotiating the

⁸Florence C. Lister and Robert H. Lister, *Earl Morris and Southwestern Archaeology* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968), pp. 106-9; Bernheimer, *Rainbow Bridge*, pp. 36, 112; Cohen, *They Built Better*, p. 150.

⁹Clarence Rogers Oral History Interview, January 8, 1974, Utah State Historical Society, p. 17; oral communication with Richard W. Sprang, Dudy Thomas’s husband.

¹⁰CLB Field Notes, July 9, 1921.

rugged canyon country. He missed no opportunity, both in his published and unpublished writings, to pay due tribute to the skill of his guides. Upon arriving at Rainbow Bridge on July 5, 1922, after arduously blasting and hacking a trail around Navajo Mountain to the south and west, a feat that Bernheimer regarded as one of the great achievements of his career, he awarded the glory not to himself, as leader of the party, but to John Wetherill:

By our reaching the Rainbow Arch at 10 A.M. to-day we have succeeded to circumnavigate Navaho Mountain with 26 heads of stock. My chief thought at this time is that posterity may recognize and appreciate the ability of John Wetherill at finding and constructing the trail through Red Bud Pass which after 4 full days of labor yielded to his genius.¹¹

Bernheimer's humility and self-deprecating sense of humor was no doubt another endearing quality. In the "Dramatis Personae" that introduces the characters at the beginning of his book, he describes each in admiring terms. John Wetherill: "Discoverer of Rainbow Natural Bridge, guide, student, geologist, and expert on matters relating to the American Indian"; Louisa Wetherill: "a woman of extraordinary ability in handling Indians"; Zeke Johnson: "Man of great experience as guide, possessing extraordinary knowledge of the country and Indians of Arizona and Utah"; and on down the list. He lists himself last, as "Charles L. Bernheimer, Tenderfoot and cliff dweller from Manhattan." When devising the text for the plaque which, at Wetherill's suggestion, the old guide installed for him in 1937 at Clara S. Bernheimer Natural Bridge in Monument Valley, Bernheimer apologized for listing Wetherill and Johnson as guides and himself as leader: "I did not like to use the word 'leader' next to my name, but I could not find any other in its stead. I assure you it was not done out of conceit, but for the purpose of indicating that I am the husband of Clara Bernheimer, without saying so."¹²

It was deeds, not mere words, that earned the respect of both Wetherill and Johnson, respect they did not hand out lightly. Each, in his own way, tested him—tests Bernheimer welcomed—and gave him high marks for passing. He ran the Wetherill gauntlet in 1921 when he made the dangerous climb into Keet Seel, refused to dismount at steep places until the others did, and kept in the saddle for three hours after

¹¹Rainbow Bridge Register, copy in Otis R. "Dock" Marston Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

¹²Bernheimer, *Rainbow Bridge*, p. xi; there are similar references in the Field Notes, e.g., July 1, 1921; Bernheimer to John Wetherill, September 10, 1936, copy in Marston Papers.



Al Smith, Charles Bernheimer, and Zeke Johnson at Betatakin, 1921. Note Bernheimer's necktie and two vests. John Wetherill photograph in possession of Harvey Leake.

Wetherill had suggested that "Mr. B." might like to stop for the night. Bernheimer had met Johnson's challenge in 1919 when he booked the guide for the Natural Bridges trip. The Mormon Co-op at Blanding, Johnson's source for provisions, had run low on supplies, and Johnson was hesitant to take the frail New Yorker into the backcountry with only such spartan fare as he himself might subsist upon. "Of course if you are afraid to start with such supplies as are available, we shall have to wait," Bernheimer taunted. "Not I," was Johnson's response. "Nor I," said Bernheimer quickly.¹³

The scientific successes of the Bernheimer expeditions were a result of the fortunate combination of his money and innocent enthusiasm for the remote canyon country, the archaeological sophistication of Earl Morris on the five trips of which he was a member, and the profound knowledge and backcountry skills of the two guides, John Wetherill and Zeke Johnson. The process through which Bernheimer met Wetherill and Johnson is unclear in each case, though it was inevitable, given his interest in the country, that he should have done so, for they were the two most famous and knowledgeable guides in the area at that time. Though the two were peers in skill, knowledge, and

¹³Bernheimer, *Rainbow Bridge*, pp. 17-18.

experience, they were polar opposites in style and personality: the one a silent, stoical Quaker, the other a gregarious, voluble Mormon.

Why two guides? The answer is not entirely clear. Bernheimer quoted a ploy of Sir Walter Raleigh to the effect that it was a division of expertise: as Queen Mary was the best dancer in Scotland and Queen Elizabeth the best dancer in England, he said, so Wetherill was the best guide south of the San Juan River and Johnson the best guide north of the river. It is, however, an inadequate answer. There is a certain symbolism lending support to Bernheimer's claim in that Wetherill was located in Kayenta and was official custodian of Rainbow Bridge and Navajo National Monuments, while Johnson, who lived in Blanding, was custodian of Natural Bridges National Monument; but in fact the knowledge of the two men overlapped greatly. Johnson had herded cattle, hauled freight, and prospected south of the river for many years, while Wetherill had an impressive record of archaeological investigation with his brothers in Grand Gulch and other canyons north of the river, as well as guiding the parties of Herbert E. Gregory, Nels C. Nelson, and Neil M. Judd through the area. Bernheimer's background in diplomacy seems to hold a more satisfying answer: though the two guides were friends and held high respect for each other, there was more than a little rivalry, too, and Bernheimer may have seen that his best interest lay in exploiting the friendly competition between them.¹⁴

Bernheimer's modesty in ascribing most of the credit for the scientific achievements of his expeditions to Wetherill, Johnson, and Morris was appropriate. Although his contribution in financial terms was vital and his field notes and publications are highly important as historical records, the Bernheimer expeditions were actually the expeditions of his more knowledgeable and experienced colleagues. Thus, as one moves into an account of the country explored by the expeditions, the focus necessarily shifts from Bernheimer to the guides and the archaeologist.

John Wetherill (1866-1944), who operated a trading post at Kayenta, Arizona, was then considered by many to be the foremost authority on the trails and points of interest in the Rainbow Plateau country. His insatiable passion to learn what was around the next bend of the canyon often left his partner, Clyde Colville, in the position of having to mind the store. It is little wonder, then, that Wetherill was happy to accommodate such dudes as Bernheimer who were willing to

¹⁴Ibid., p. 13.



*“Hosteen John” Wetherill
at Tsegi Canyon, 1924. He
ran a trading post at
Kayenta, Arizona, and was
considered by many the
expert on the Rainbow
Plateau country.*

pay for the privilege of seeing the country—they not only provided him with income to supplement the meager returns of the trading business but also allowed him to pursue his favorite pastime.

John’s father, Benjamin Kite Wetherill, was a Pennsylvania Quaker who headed west as a young man. His adventures included a

position as arbitrator of disputes along the Chisholm Trail. President U.S. Grant had turned over the administration of Indian affairs to Quakers because of their demonstrated interest in the welfare of the natives, and the elder Wetherill's experience in that capacity served him well in later years when he finally settled with his family in the tiny frontier community of Mancos, Colorado. The year was 1880, and relations between the settlers and the local Utes were none too cordial. The Wetherills, however, won the Indians' trust and were consequently allowed to run their cattle on Ute land. It was during the course of that activity that the great cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde were discovered. The passion of discovery soon took precedence over other family interests and destined all five Wetherill brothers to become inveterate explorers, each in his own way.

John and his bride Louisa Wade moved from Colorado to New Mexico where they were employed at a succession of trading posts. In 1906 they left New Mexico for the desolate Utah Strip south of the San Juan River where they could start their own business without the burden of competition from other traders or the red tape required of traders who operated on the Navajo reservation. At Oljato (Moonlight Water) they built a crude structure that served as a house and store. The site was chosen because of the good water supply and its proximity to the Navajo reservation but certainly not because of its convenience. It is a testimony to pioneer courage that Louisa was willing to leave her friends and the benefits of civilization in order to establish a home in a location that was seventy miles from the nearest white neighbor. Before long, however, she and John established friendships with the local Indians. John acquired the title "Hosteen John," indicative of their respect for him. Louisa became known as "Asthon Sosi," meaning "Slim Woman."

While the Wetherills were living at Oljato, Louisa heard rumors of the existence of a large natural arch near Navajo Mountain. Byron Cummings of the University of Utah, who had been conducting archaeological investigations in the area, asked her to inquire among the Indians as to its location and in 1909 hired John to outfit and guide his "Utah Archaeological Expedition" on a quest to reach it. Coincidentally, William Boone Douglass of the General Land Office was organizing his own party, and the two groups, which combined, rode under the arch on August 14.

Wetherill, who was appointed custodian of Rainbow Bridge National Monument, guided most of the expeditions to the arch from

1909 until 1924 when Rainbow Lodge was built at the base of Navajo Mountain. In 1910 he moved about twenty miles south to Kayenta, Arizona, where he built a trading post and sprawling house with accommodations for guests. He, Louisa, and Colville lived there for the rest of their lives.

Wetherill's standard tourist fare included an eight-day round trip over the hundred-mile trail to Rainbow Bridge with an excursion to the Tsegi Canyon cliff dwellings of Navajo National Monument. The trail led from Kayenta up Laguna Creek to the head of the Tsegi, then northeasterly through Piute Canyon at the Upper Crossing, and around the eastern base of Navajo Mountain. Northeast of the mountain it merged with the trail that was used on the 1909 expedition, a strenuous route that crosses a complex maze of canyons and slickrock domes before dropping into the head of Rainbow Bridge Canyon. Until the 1922 Bernheimer expedition this section of the trail was the only route into the monument that could be negotiated by a pack train.

Wetherill gained a reputation for his ability to pick his way across seemingly inaccessible country and to keep going even when the obstacles seemed insurmountable. William Boone Douglass, recalling the Rainbow Bridge discovery expedition, remarked, "I never saw any one who could get a party over as much ground in so short a time as [Wetherill]." According to Neil Judd, a budding archaeologist who was among Cummings's students in the summer of 1909, "John Wetherill was a determined man, especially on the trail. He improvised but never turned back; he always fought his way forward to his intended destination."¹⁵

Ezekiel Johnson (1869-1957), who was fifty years old when he met Bernheimer in 1919, had lived a rough and diverse life.¹⁶ He was the twenty-fourth child of Mormon polygamist and Kane County pioneer Joel H. Johnson, a cold and tyrannical father. The rigors of life on the southern Utah frontier meant a harsh existence for children as well as adults, and the Johnson children were expected to grow up fast and assume a productive role in the family economy. As a very young child Zeke began helping the men in the fields, and at the age of fourteen he

¹⁵William Boone Douglass to Louisa Wetherill, September 19, 1909, copy in Marston Papers; Neil M. Judd, *Men Met along the Trail* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), p. 96. The definitive biography of John Wetherill has not been written, but see Frances Gillmor and Louisa Wade Wetherill, *Traders to the Navajos* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1934), and Mary Apolline Comfort, *Rainbow to Yesterday* (New York: Vantage Press, 1980).

¹⁶Unless otherwise ascribed, the Johnson biographical material given here comes from "Zeke: A Story of Mountain and Desert," anonymous MS in Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.



Ezekiel "Zeke" Johnson, raconteur and highly skilled horseman, at Cliff Canyon base camp, 1922. USHS collections.

worked for his older brother Nephi riding the mail route from Kanab to St. George. In 1886 he took up the life of a cowpuncher on the Arizona Strip, and two years later entered into an unhappy marriage with the first of five wives, most of whom he outlived.

Although Johnson abandoned the life of a cowboy briefly during the 1890s to join the gold diggers of the San Juan Canyon, he spent most of that decade hunting wild cattle for the Bluff Co-op, an experience that enhanced his formidable and intimate knowledge of the San Juan Triangle country. "See all those trees down there?" he asked a tourist party on Elk Ridge once. "Sure thick. And I've had a wild cow tied to every one of 'em." Catching wild cattle in brush country, as the writings of J. Frank Dobie and Ben K. Green attest, is a rough business, requiring not only special horses and horsemanship, but a high degree of plain toughness as well. Zeke Johnson was one of the toughest. Even in rough canyons where, one student of the wild cattle business on the San Juan says, "a horseman here might well be frus-

trated when trying to ride through this snagged labyrinth at a jog trot," Johnson "rode at full speed, flinging himself violently from side to side of his horse's withers or ducking clear down below his saddle horn to avoid being swept off by low limbs as his eager cow pony strained to catch a fleeing critter."¹⁷

In 1898, presumably on one of his cattle-hunting expeditions, he saw the Natural Bridges for the first time. "I was just thrilled," he recalled, "and resolved that I would be their protector," a wish that came to pass when he was appointed the first custodian of the Natural Bridges National Monument, at a salary of one dollar per month with the guide and horse rental concessions.¹⁸

It is one of the miracles of the human spirit that one such as Zeke Johnson could emerge from a life of hardship and sorrow with such a famously bouyant personality, for he became known in the canyon country as an unparalleled wit and raconteur. His stories, jokes, and songs were in ubiquitous evidence on the trails and in the campsites of the Bernheimer expeditions, to the latter's great delight. "Johnson is an incorrigible optimist," Bernheimer wrote. "If at a difficult place the mules kick and bite each other and slip their loads, he sings either some fancy song someone else composed or a dockerel [*sic*] of his own. He laughs and jokes and is perpetual sunshine."¹⁹ Bernheimer even interrupted his narrative of the day's events in his field notes to record Johnson's songs:

Put on airs—put on airs,
Tis so everywhere;
If you do as folks and fashions do;
You got to put on airs.²⁰

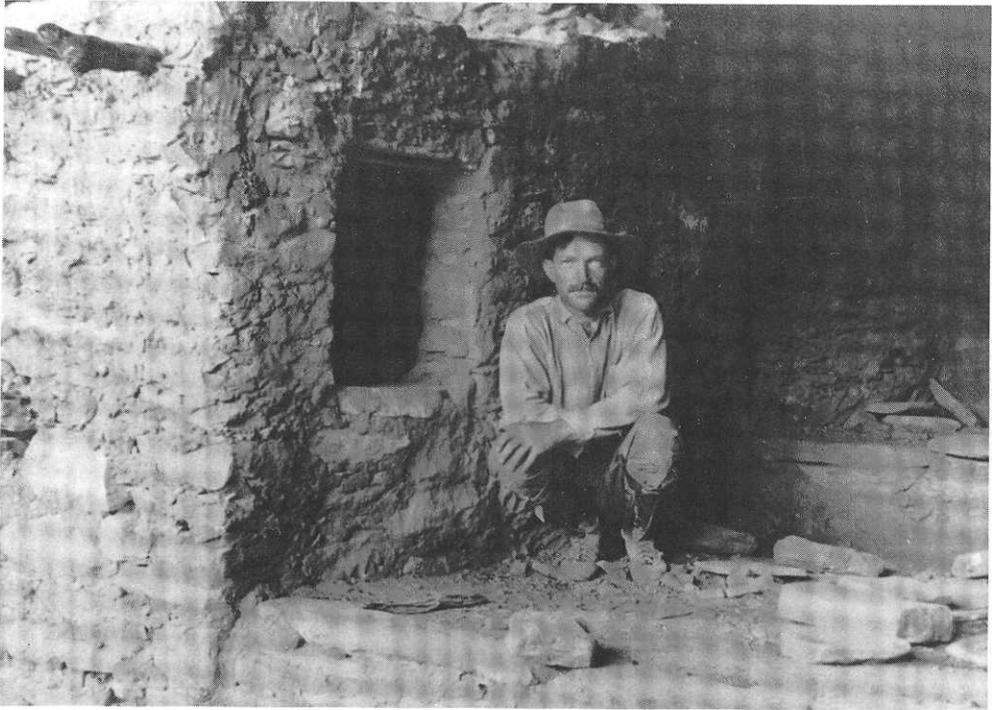
Although Earl Halstead Morris (1889-1956) participated in only five of the Bernheimer expeditions (1921, 1922, 1923, 1929, and 1930), his importance transcends mere time spent on the trail, for it was through Morris that most of the important archaeological contributions of the Bernheimer expeditions were made. The influence was mutual, too, for Bernheimer's money made it possible for Morris to spend extensive time in locales he would never have been able to visit on his

¹⁷Karl Young, "Wild Cows of the San Juan," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 32 (Summer 1964): 252, 254, 262-63.

¹⁸Utah Writers Project, *Utah: A Guide to the State* (New York: Hastings House, 1941), pp. 501-7; Charles Kelly and Charlotte Martin, "Zeke Johnson's Natural Bridges," *Desert Magazine*, November 1947, pp. 12-15.

¹⁹CLB Field Notes, May 22, 1920.

²⁰*Ibid.*, June 1, 1929.



Earl H. Morris, one of the great southwestern archaeologists, at Keet Seel, 1922. He excavated and restored the Great Kiva at Aztec National Monument in northwestern New Mexico. USHS collections.

own. Perhaps most important, it was through Bernheimer's guide, John Wetherill, that Morris became acquainted with Canyon del Muerto where he made his first extensive studies of the Basketmakers.

When Morris met Bernheimer in 1921 he was already well on his way to becoming one of the greatest of southwestern archaeologists.²¹ He had begun his career at about the earliest possible age, uncovering his first Anasazi artifacts at the age of three while digging in some ruins in the Farmington, New Mexico, area with his father, Scott N. Morris, an ambitious young Pennsylvanian who had migrated to New Mexico to seek his fortune in the freighting business. The murder of Scott Morris in 1904 by a business associate was a profoundly important tragedy for the son. His mother became a recluse for the rest of her life (although Bernheimer found her to be charming, bright, and well educated) and dependent upon her son. Morris himself became bitter; his shyness and introspective nature intensified, and for the rest of his

²¹Unless otherwise cited, the following material on Morris is based on Lister and Lister, *Earl Morris and Southwestern Archaeology*.

life he knew few pleasures besides those he could dig from the earth. Archaeology became his hobby, his profession, and his life. His skill with the shovel, the whiskbroom, the camel's hair brush, and the other tools of the trade became legendary, as did his seemingly preternatural instinct for knowing where to dig. Time and again he made amazing discoveries at sites previously thought to have been exhausted.

Morris entered the University of Colorado in 1908, an institution to which he remained deeply loyal throughout his life, even though he spent most of his career in the employ of more handsomely endowed eastern institutions. By the time he terminated his formal education with the M.A. degree in 1915, he had made the profound transition from pothunter to scientist and had come under the lasting influence of such then-prominent men as Edgar L. Hewitt, Jesse W. Fewkes, and Byron Cummings. Although the younger generation of which Morris was a part considered the work of men like Hewitt and Fewkes, who operated under a heavy romantic bias, to be shallow and misleading, he did learn from them professional field techniques that later served him well in his own work.

Morris was a part of virtually every important development in the infancy and early maturity of southwestern archaeology. Beginning in the summer of 1915 he worked with Nels C. Nelson of the American Museum of Natural History on a dig on the upper Rio Grande, where Nelson was devising ways to apply the principle of stratigraphy, previously developed on the ruins of the ancient Mediterranean, to southwestern sites. In 1919 Morris became converted to the dendrochronology dating project of Professor A. E. Douglass, an astronomer at the University of Arizona. Over the years Morris contributed innumerable tree specimens to Douglass from ruins in which he was working and helped in a major way to establish the basis for dating southwestern sites. It was, he asserted late in life, to his estimation his most important contribution to the field. Morris's role in the Pecos conference in August 1927, which established the basic terminology and chronology for the Basketmaker-Pueblo culture was of central importance. Finally, his work on the Basketmakers of Grand Gulch, Falls Creek, the Animas Valley, and Canyon del Muerto was of vital importance in establishing both the chronology and diagnostic features distinguishing the various stages of development and the fact that they represented an unbroken cultural continuity.

At the time he met Bernheimer, Morris's fame as an archaeologist rested upon his excavation and restoration of the ruins at Aztec, New

Mexico, an ambitious and precedent-setting, though controversial, project. Morris gave his life to Aztec as to no other site. By an arrangement with the American Museum of Natural History in 1919, he actually built a home at the ruin and enjoyed, as the Listers point out, a situation previously known only by Richard Wetherill at Pueblo Bonito, of an archaeologist living in the midst of his work. He lived at Aztec until 1955 when he retired and moved to Boulder, Colorado. Morris's restoration of the Great Kiva at Aztec, though criticized by purist colleagues as artificial and speculative, became a model for similar projects and was clearly one of the crowning achievements of his career.

Although Morris wrote a number of articles on southwestern prehistory and an important monograph on Anasazi basketry, his perfectionism prevented him from producing the quantity of publications on southwestern archaeology that his career would have supported. Nevertheless, when he died in 1956 he was recognized as one of the truly seminal figures in the field, a reputation that has remained unchallenged.

Morris's relation with Bernheimer was respectful and cordial, though perhaps more formal than the relationships Bernheimer enjoyed with the other long-standing members of his expeditions, Wetherill and Johnson. Wealthy patrons were obviously crucial to the success of southwestern archaeology, a fact that Morris vividly realized, and he was careful to cultivate Bernheimer and to keep his interests in the country alive and directed toward the most scientifically promising areas and projects. He first met Bernheimer through Clark Wissler of the American Museum of Natural History. Morris was the only employee of the museum located within the area of Bernheimer's interest, and Wissler referred to him Bernheimer's request for a trained professional who could explain the archaeological meaning of ruins such as Betatakin, Keet Seel, and Inscription House. In spite of his archaeological interests, Bernheimer at the time was captivated by the scenic attractions of Rainbow Bridge and the idea of making another trail to it south and west of Navajo Mountain. Morris's mission, from the perspective of the American Museum of Natural History, was to get Bernheimer interested in professional archaeology and to encourage him to finance expeditions into regions with more archaeological promise than the Navajo Mountain area.

The first significant Bernheimer expeditions were those of 1921 and 1922 on the Rainbow Plateau. Bernheimer's first visit to the area was a 1920 trip to Rainbow Bridge under the guidance of Wetherill and

Johnson. Except for an excursion to the top of Navajo Mountain, it comprised little more than Wetherill's standard tourist itinerary. However, it aroused Bernheimer's interest in the region and set the stage for a number of subsequent expeditions that were far more significant. His summary of the accomplishments of the more daring 1921 trip is descriptive of all his later explorations: "Much new territory never visited by white men was traversed. Many erroneous reports can now be controverted. A large number of unnamed places, canyons and mesas, received appropriate names which we hope may become permanent."²²

The dual objectives of the 1921 expedition were to explore the western half of the Rainbow Plateau and to blaze a new trail to Rainbow Bridge around the west side of Navajo Mountain. It is not clear who suggested this particular itinerary, but Bernheimer was obviously enthusiastic about it—especially about the challenge of locating a "Northwest Passage" to the arch. As a consequence, the 1921 Bernheimer expedition became the first to explore Forbidding Canyon systematically and to document many of its geographical features. The published accounts of the trip revealed to the nation that the West had not yet been completely conquered.

The personnel of the expedition included Bernheimer, Wetherill, Johnson, and two wranglers supplied by Wetherill: Al Smith, who had been on the 1920 expedition, and Shadani, a Navajo from Nokai Canyon.

After traversing the now familiar Tsegi Canyon, a visit to Inscription House ruin introduced Bernheimer to the Navajo Canyon drainage which forms the southern boundary of the Rainbow Plateau. A local mustached Navajo named Not-si-san (Navajo Mountain) was hired to lead the entourage to the Colorado River in an attempt to find the Crossing of the Fathers. Although the actual location of the ford was missed by about five miles, the reconnaissance of the country west of Cummings Mesa was of value in providing the explorers and those who read their accounts with a better perception of the geography of a section of the country that had been inadequately mapped and that had never been described in print before.

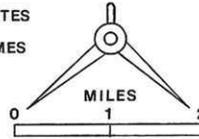
For some inexplicable reason Bernheimer found Navajo Canyon to be depressing. A campsite on Jay-i Creek, a northern tributary that joins Navajo Creek near its midpoint, he ungratefully named "Do-ya-

²²CLB Field Notes, July 15, 1921.

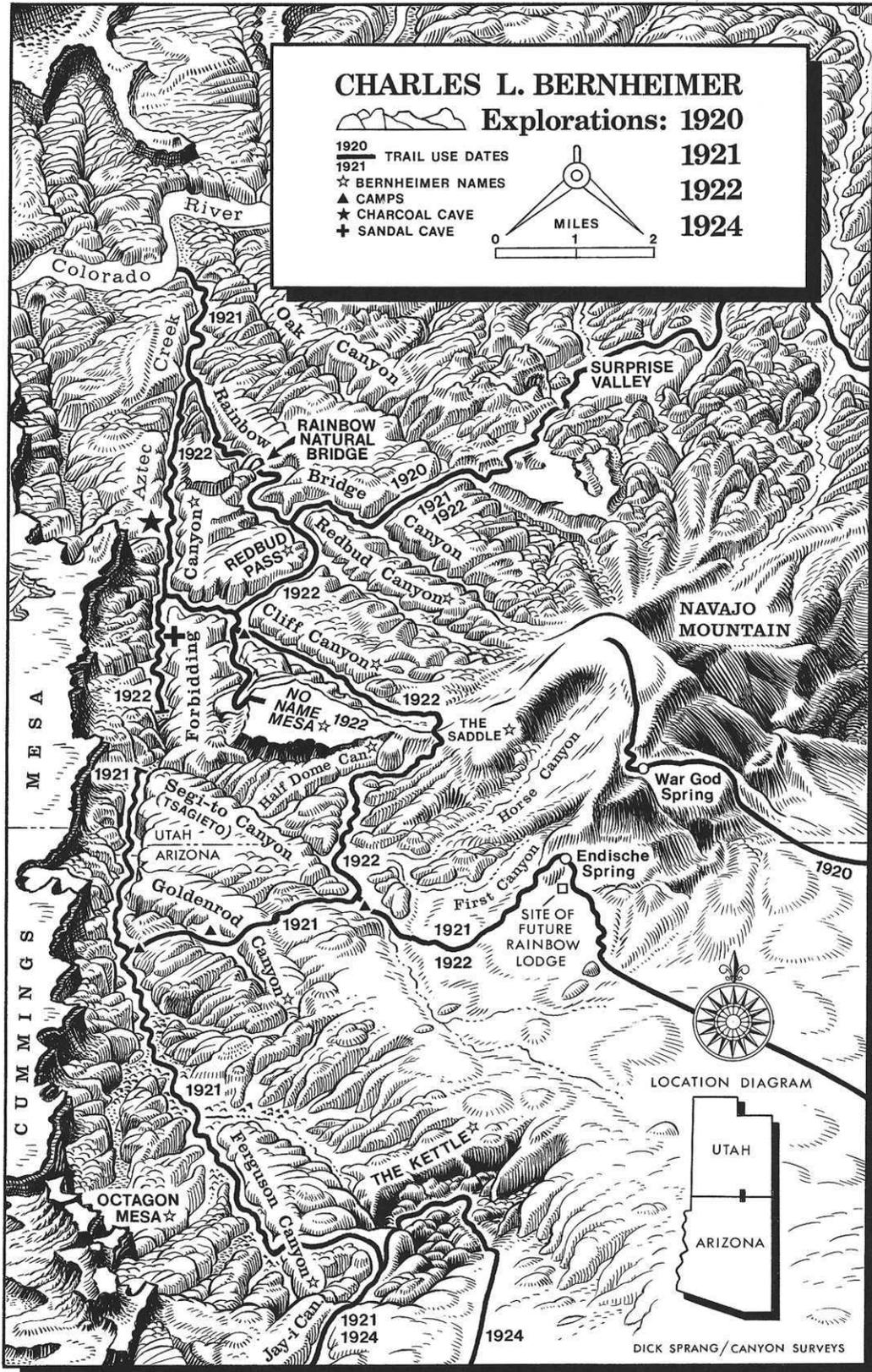
CHARLES L. BERNHEIMER

Explorations: 1920

- 1920 TRAIL USE DATES
- 1921
- ☆ BERNHEIMER NAMES
- ▲ CAMPS
- ★ CHARCOAL CAVE
- + SANDAL CAVE



- 1921
- 1922
- 1924



DICK SPRANG / CANYON SURVEYS

shon-da,” which is Navajo for “No Good.” Camp No Good eventually proved to be more useful than first thought, serving as headquarters for the 1924 expedition to Cummings Mesa and the mouth of Navajo Canyon, but Bernheimer’s feeling toward the area persisted. “I always dreaded Navajo Canyon, which may account for my being attracted to it as a fly is to the fire,” he later admitted.²³

Before leaving Navajo Canyon for the uninhabited country to the north, it was determined that additional feed was needed for the livestock. Shadani was sent on an excursion to procure grain from the local Navajos but returned with the discouraging news that he was able to obtain only one bag of corn. This caused Bernheimer even more anxiety. “Now I understand, as never before, what it means to get out into wild, unknown regions, to depend on what one can carry along and what one can wrench from Mother Earth in her sternest mood,” he wrote.²⁴ Despite the risk, which perhaps was not as great as he imagined, the party proceeded northerly up Jay-i Creek toward Forbidding Canyon, following a primitive trail Wetherill had traversed approximately ten years earlier.

Beyond the divide of the two canyon systems they encountered a vast depression named “The Kettle.” Morris described it as “a maze of tortuous cañons winding in and out among dumpling-like knobs of rock, too hopelessly rough to be crossed by a pack train.”²⁵ To Bernheimer, “it had the characteristics of a crater but might have been a blowout of natural gas, an indication of the presence of oil.”²⁶ It is actually the broad, deep head of the eastern branch of Forbidding Canyon. The outlet, a narrow slit, is barely detectable from the rim and gives the impression that the sides form a continuous bowl.

The party skirted the obstacle because, as Bernheimer explained, “no one could climb down a kettle’s side.” Access to the drainage was possible via the western branch which they called “Ferguson Canyon” in honor of an earlier explorer who had left a record of his visit. “With the exception of Wetherill, Morris, myself, and a man by the name of Ferguson who had carved his name on a rock, I believe no white men have been in this vicinity,” said Bernheimer.²⁷

²³Ibid., June 19, 1924.

²⁴Bernheimer, *Rainbow Bridge*, p. 63.

²⁵Earl H. Morris, “An Unexplored Area of the Southwest,” *Natural History* 22 (November/December 1922): 508.

²⁶Bernheimer, *Rainbow Bridge*, p. 65.

²⁷Ibid., p. 66. Bernheimer failed to notice the names of G. Emerson, J. P. Miller, and M. S. Foote inscribed in the cliff. It is likely that these men had come into the canyon from Navajo Mountain in the early 1880s in search of the rumored Mitchell-Merrick silver mine.

Bernheimer, whose previous trips had been over established trails, was continually impressed by Wetherill's ability to find ways through rough country, although he did not view the skill as romantically as he had the year before. At that time he had written, "Mr. Wetherill is of course a genius and has a sixth sense which one riding behind him feels guides and directs him."²⁸ In 1921 he observed that Wetherill's "memory of the faint and intermittent Indian trails is most remarkable. We strayed but rarely. He is beyond all doubt the typical pathfinder or pathmaker."²⁹ Bernheimer's fear of becoming lost was perhaps diminished by the realization that the passable routes had already been discovered by the Indians and that it was not clairvoyance that was required of a guide but rather the ability to detect the sometimes subtle signs of earlier usage.

His confidence, however, was soon dashed:

At six o'clock that evening we found we had lost our way. This was due to the fact that there were no trails hereabouts to be depended on. Such as there were proved misleading. They were merely old tracks made by sheep and goats that come into this region to graze when there is extreme drought elsewhere; and at best goat trails are notoriously undependable and far from serviceable for a packtrain.³⁰

And the next morning an event occurred that left Bernheimer even more bewildered:

Wetherill this morning on foot went off early scouting for trails down West Canyon. . . . He, being a perfect type of the individualist, did not say why he went afoot, when he would be back, whether he would travel on the slick rocks to the right or left of the canyon, whether he was looking for a way out of it.³¹

Shortly after lunch, Wetherill returned with the disheartening news that the lower canyon was impassable except on foot and that he had not been able to find an alternate route to the canyon rim. Morris best described the cause of the predicament:

An adequate conception of the ruggedness of this particular region cannot be conveyed in words. . . . In looking from the foot of Cummings Mesa toward Navajo Mountain, the foreground might be likened to a sea driven in the teeth of a hurricane, the waves of which at their height had been transfixed to salmon-colored stone.³²

²⁸CLB Field Notes, May 22, 1920.

²⁹Bernheimer, *Rainbow Bridge*, pp. 65-66.

³⁰Ibid., p. 66.

³¹CLB Field Notes, July 8, 1921.

³²Morris, "An Unexplored Area," pp. 508-9.

It was across that sea that they needed to pass, and it was Johnson who finally found a route that he described as “not so bad.” Bernheimer quipped, “If Johnson’s ‘not so bad’ signified anything at all, I should say his ‘bad’ must be impossible.”³³

The party covered only a few miles that day, but at the end of their trail they found a delightful glen in a side canyon. “Here was Goldenrod Cañon, a natural garden,” Morris noted, “and just across that ridge, Navajo Cañon, desolation incarnate.”³⁴ But Morris had further reason for enthusiasm, for he observed prehistoric remains in several caves as they ascended the base of Navajo Mountain. Although the ruins were all small, they offered much more scientific promise than the sites in Forbidding Canyon. At the time, Morris suspected that Wetherill had bypassed larger ruins in the interest of later study by his more established clients such as Byron Cummings, but he later realized that there simply are no large ruins in the canyon.

To the north the men observed a saddle between Navajo Mountain and “the nameless mesa to the west of it,” but Wetherill advised against attempting to reach Rainbow Bridge by that route because of the uncertainty of success and the limited provisions on hand. “Altogether it is difficult to describe the obstacles that must be overcome on a ‘first journey’ by which I mean a journey never before tried by white man under white man’s conditions,” Bernheimer said with disappointment.³⁵ If the arch was to be reached that year, it would have to be over the trail around the north side of the mountain. Although Bernheimer had already been over that route, they decided to proceed anyway.

“The bridge is not more than six or eight miles in an air line from Clematis and Goldenrod camps [in Forbidding Canyon], but to get there we had ridden fully fifty miles, and in so doing had made almost the complete circuit of Navajo Mountain,” Morris wrote.³⁶ “Almost” was not enough to satisfy Bernheimer.

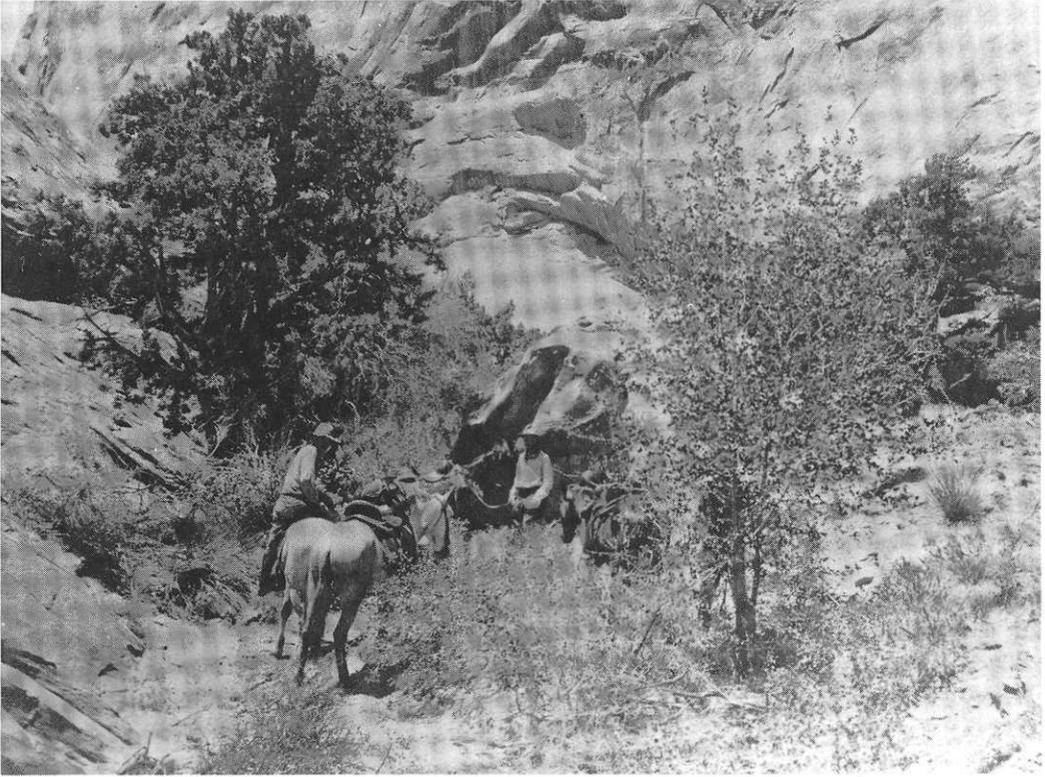
The following summer, 1922, he returned, and his dream finally became reality with the aid of determination, planning, and a mule load of “dynamite, TNT, and black powder.” This accomplishment was a source of great pride for the now-seasoned explorer, and his popular accounts of the feat in a book and a *National Geographic* article were destined to create a generation of canyon country enthusiasts,

³³Bernheimer, *Rainbow Bridge*, p. 70.

³⁴Morris, “An Unexplored Area,” p. 509-10.

³⁵CLB Field Notes, July 9, 1921.

³⁶“An Unexplored Area,” p. 512.



Earl Morris, 1922, beside the red bud tree after which the Bernheimer party named the pass on the trail to Rainbow Bridge. USHS collections.

many of whom eventually made the trip to the arch over the new “Bernheimer Trail.” Incidental to that achievement, and of greater scientific significance, was the Bernheimer party’s exploration of Cliff Canyon, lower Forbidding Canyon, and No Name Mesa.

As Bernheimer’s field notes reveal, the logistics of the undertaking were difficult enough to dissuade all but the most resolute:

Our cavalcade is very large this year. There is Wetherill, Johnson, Morris, Al and Jess Smith, . . . Sagi-nini-jazi, and myself. We have twenty seven animals . . . [and] tools, all very heavy, which we carry in order to work our way through. Three sledge hammers, three shovels and spades, two picks, drills, and other heavy iron tools . . . and . . . of course, feed.³⁷

Although Morris participated in the 1922 expedition, he was not particularly happy to be spending another season in geographical reconnaissance on the Rainbow Plateau. He had proposed a trip into

³⁷CLB Field Notes, July 1, 1922.

the unexplored and archaeologically promising Lukaichukai and Carriso mountains on the border of Arizona and New Mexico. Bernheimer's mind was made up, though, and Morris yielded to his wishes in hopes of convincing his benefactor of the value of a future expedition devoted primarily to archaeology. Perhaps in an attempt to make the best of a less than ideal situation, Morris set off by himself into the upper tributaries of Forbidding Canyon while the rest of the group looked for a route to Rainbow Bridge. The most imposing ruin he visited had already been excavated by Cummings, but he found several smaller sites.

Meanwhile, the others scouted on foot to determine whether the pass they had seen the year before between Navajo Mountain and the mesa to the west of it could be negotiated by pack animals. The mesa, which stretches from high on the mountain to the sheer walls of Forbidding Canyon, was one of the major obstacles that had thwarted the 1921 plans. Bernheimer now referred to it as "Nameless Mesa," and later in the trip as "No Name Mesa." Given his penchant for naming geographical features, it is a mystery why he did not choose a less enigmatic title for such an imposing landmark.

Wetherill climbed to the saddle and reported that although the route appeared to be traversable, it would require descent into a deep canyon north of No Name Mesa which they called "Cliff Canyon." A few cairns along the thousand-foot ascent marked an ancient trail. "It was not," Bernheimer commented, "the kind of trail we associate at home with woodcraft."³⁸

The descent into Cliff Canyon was treacherous. The two thousand foot drop is still impressive and difficult, though eased somewhat now by a well-used trail. And many modern-day hikers have been tempted to echo Bernheimer's melodramatic exclamation upon discovering the dry creek bed at the bottom: "To turn back was impossible[;] confronting us was the unknown!"³⁹ Fortunately a perennial water source exists a few miles downstream.

The next day the group found a better campsite about a mile farther west near a Basketmaker site Morris had identified. They split up from there in an attempt to find a route into Rainbow Bridge

³⁸Ibid., June 29, 1922. The somewhat inaccurate 1892 Geological Survey "Marsh Pass" topographical map shows a trail in the general vicinity, but the field records of the surveyors, Arthur P. Davis and H. M. Wilson, apparently have been lost or destroyed. It is possible that they, or members of their crews, utilized the trail during their 1883-84 field work.

³⁹Bernheimer, "Encircling Navajo Mountain with a Pack Train," p. 213.

Canyon, a tributary of which they correctly supposed to be the next canyon to the north. Bernheimer and Johnson followed Cliff Canyon to its junction with Forbidding Canyon and proceeded down the latter a few miles until halted by a deep pool and steep walls. Before turning back they observed

an immense cave shelf at least three hundred feet long and one hundred and fifty feet deep, a perfect concave dome. Its floor space fully half an acre was strewn everywhere with charcoal. Dozens of ancient fire places large and small, some shrine-like, covered the floor.⁴⁰

The two men scratched their names into the sandstone at the back of the cave.

In the meantime, Wetherill explored the area north of camp and Morris climbed to a high vantage point. In the afternoon the party reassembled, all with discouraging reports. Wetherill declared that the obstacles in Forbidding Canyon would have to be overcome, but after Johnson and Bernheimer reiterated the difficulties, he decided to look at the side canyon north of camp once more.

That route, which was to become known as Red Bud Pass, was already familiar to Wetherill, but he evidently hesitated to recommend it because of the difficulties it presented in making it passable for the animals. Wetherill's initials are inscribed in the cliff near the northern terminus of the pass along with the date "3-14-1911," and a note added to a 1911 entry in the Rainbow Bridge register explains that he had "walked over mountain while hunting trail around to north and west of mountain. Found place where trail was afterward built by Bernheimer in 1922."⁴¹ Although he had previously visited the area, he reserved the credit for the opening of the pass for Bernheimer. Wetherill sometimes used such a means of honoring his clients for the accomplishments of expeditions they financed and downplayed the significance of his own contributions. "The Indians found it long before the white men came," he said of Rainbow Bridge.⁴²

⁴⁰CLB Field Notes, June 30, 1922.

⁴¹Rainbow Bridge Register, photocopy in Marston Papers. The possibility of pre-1909 sightings of Rainbow Bridge is one of the most vexed questions of Utah historiography, and the present essay can only note that some of the supposed early visitors claim to have reached the arch by means of what later became known as the Bernheimer Trail through Red Bud Pass. James W. Black, for example, recorded a notarized statement on September 27, 1930, that in January 1892 he was prospecting in the Navajo Mountain area and "crossed over the mountain into a large canyon now known as Cliff Canyon, and through a pass now called Red Bud Pass." Copy in Marston Papers. An Indian trader, William Franklyn Williams, made the improbable claim that he and two others "had no trouble taking their horses through what is now known as Redbud Pass" to a sighting of Rainbow Bridge in 1884. Weldon F. Heald, "Who Discovered Rainbow Bridge?" *Sierra Club Bulletin* 40 (October 1955): 24-28.

⁴²John Stewart MacClary, "Trail-Blazer to Rainbow Bridge," *Desert Magazine*, June 1938, p. 34.



Members of Bernheimer's 1922 expedition on the rim of Cliff Canyon scouting for a way into Rainbow Bridge Canyon. USHS collections.

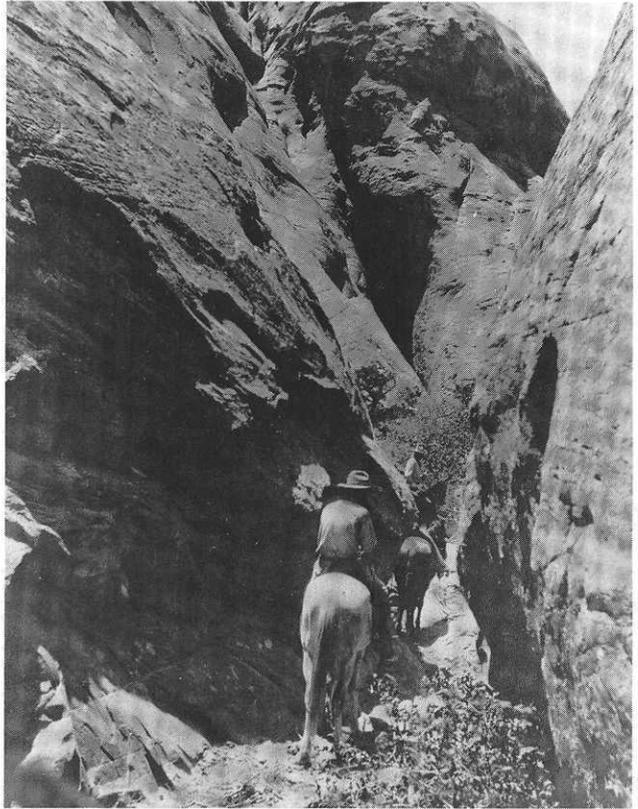
Four days of backbreaking work were required to clear the way for the animals and their packs. At one place the walls were only two feet apart and had to be chipped away. As Morris described it,

The major obstacle was a fissure between great vertical slabs of stone, perhaps 3 ft. wide at the bottom and thirty feet deep. We rolled loose blocks of stone down into it from the cliffs on the W. side, then shot down and sledged to pieces the two vertical leaves of stone at the W. side of the fissure, until the slit was filled and widened enough for the animals to climb down it.⁴³

Johnson was unable to help for the first couple of days because of a leg injury, though he proved to be “a recalcitrant patient” under the ministrations of Wetherill and Bernheimer. Bernheimer himself suffered—somewhat less, one suspects—from a back problem and mosquito bites, but his efforts to embrace western ways were beginning to enable him to look at such hardships philosophically.⁴⁴ Actually, Bern-

⁴³Earl H. Morris Field Notes, July 2, 1922.

⁴⁴CLB Field Notes, July 4, 1922.



*Red Bud Pass, looking east.
Bernheimer noted on this
photograph: "at last wide
enough to get through with a
horse." USHS collections.*

heimer had it easy compared to the men who were doing the work. While they spent long days wielding picks and sledgehammers in the hot sun he was resting in the shade, writing voluminous notes, and taking baths in a pool in Cliff Canyon.

On July 5 the pack train negotiated Red Bud Pass and proceeded down canyon to Rainbow Bridge. Bernheimer was almost ecstatic but credited the success to Wetherill's ingenuity. Wetherill, Morris, and Jess Smith continued on foot to the mouth of Rainbow Bridge Canyon and then up Forbidding Canyon. The rest of the men took the stock back through Red Bud Pass and met the hikers at "Charcoal Cave" in Forbidding Canyon. Wetherill pointed out his initials on the slope above the creekbed opposite the cave which marked the southern limit of an earlier excursion up the canyon.

Morris described the major barrier there as "the largest pool in the entire country aside from the Colo. River." Although he was not unfamiliar with the occasional severity of desert weather, he recorded that conditions at that time were really extraordinary:

The heat this day was the worst I have ever experienced. The wind blowing over the hot rocks actually burned one's eye balls and made one

gasp for breath. The night was also hot. One could not lay naked because of the mosquitos, and beneath even a canvas perspiration ran in streams. Water in the pails was above body temperature on the morning of the 6th.⁴⁵

Despite the heat, Wetherill set out in an attempt to ascend Forbidding Canyon to the point where he was stymied the year before. He found that it was too hopelessly rough to be developed as an alternate route. In the meantime, Morris dug through the debris in Charcoal Cave and found a skeleton which he declared to be that of a Basketmaker. He considered it significant that evidence of this early culture was found so far west. The men also found some sandals at a site above the mouth of Cliff Canyon and named the place "Sandal Cave."

The ascent of No Name Mesa was the objective of the next two days. It was not evident that there was a way to breach its sheer sides, but Johnson found a cleft across from the mouth of Red Bud Pass which, with great difficulty, he used to reach the first bench above the canyon floor. Morris, Wetherill, and Jess Smith succeeded in reaching the mesa top the second day via "Johnson's Hole" but found it to be "the most trying mountaineering experience that they ever had." They saw no sign of prior human intrusion except for what appeared to be a cairn.⁴⁶

The Bernheimer party used Red Bud Pass again on the return trip to Kayenta, this time to gain access to the original Rainbow Bridge trail. Thus, in Bernheimer's words, "The rugged forbidding giant rock, Navajo Mountain, the War Gods' Dwelling Place was circumnavigated."⁴⁷

The only significant portion of Forbidding Canyon not explored by the 1921 and 1922 expeditions was the mysterious Kettle. The 1924 Bernheimer expedition discovered an incredibly rough trail to its bottom, and it too succumbed to Bernheimer's passion to go where white men had apparently never been. "We followed Forbidding Canyon in its course to its beginning," he wrote in his journal. "Its whole life history is like its birth place. Rough threatening life and limb. Comparatively narrow though the Kettle is, it was difficult to pick a way which did not necessitate retracing."⁴⁸ The 1924 expedition

⁴⁵Earl H. Morris Field Notes, July 5, 1922.

⁴⁶CLB Field Notes, July 8, 1922.

⁴⁷Ibid., July 14, 1922.

⁴⁸Ibid., June 17, 1924.



Bernheimer's party leaving Kayenta in 1924. USHS collections.

also accomplished the second recorded ascent of Cummings Mesa⁴⁹ and extensive exploration of Navajo Canyon and its tributaries.

Now submerged in its lower reaches by the Lake Powell reservoir, Forbidding Canyon is the most-visited of all the reservoir's tributaries, as tourist boaters by the thousand motor up as far as Rainbow Bridge Canyon and turn in to dock almost beneath the great arch. Many, too, proceed on up Forbidding for some miles to enjoy the dramatic scenery. Beyond the head of the estuary, though, the canyon still presents to hikers the obstacles that earned its name; one may still view the drop-offs and pools that brought the 1921 Bernheimer expedition to a halt and rendered necessary the creation of Red Bud Pass as an alternative overland route to Rainbow Bridge. In those upper reaches the canyon and its tributaries are today almost as little known as they were in Bernheimer's day, and without Bernheimer's field notes and publications they would be even today largely a geographical mystery.

The story of the Bernheimer expeditions, then, is an important record of hard-won geographical knowledge. Even more important perhaps, it is a story of man's love for nature's secret places, the rough country where one encounters nature's imperatives and her primeval forces directly. Bernheimer's exploration of Forbidding Canyon was only a phase of his nine major expeditions into the Four Corners region, but it aptly demonstrates the tenacity required to uncover the secrets of one of America's last frontiers. "Man can do almost anything," the cliff dweller from Manhattan concluded, "if he is persistent, wisely courageous, and has sufficient imagination."⁵⁰

⁴⁹The first recorded ascent of Cummings Mesa was made by Byron Cummings and John Wetherill in 1919. Lyndon Lane Hargrave, *Report on Archaeological Reconnaissance in the Rainbow Plateau Area of Northern Arizona and Southern Utah* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1935), p. 14; Bernheimer, *Rainbow Bridge*, p. 178.

⁵⁰Bernheimer, *Rainbow Bridge*, p. 95.