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The Place No One Knew: Glen Canyon On The Colorado (25th Anniversary Commemorative Edition)



Synopsis

Glen Canyon, now Lake Powell, is rediscovered through wonderful color images by Elliott Porter.

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Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a 25th anniversary edition, revised and updated, of master nature photographer Porter's 1963 paean to a unique natural wonder of compressed geology and atmospheric caprice now long since extinguished by a power-project dam. The work still excites as both camera art and a spur to wilderness preservation. Light, shadow and tinted hue play changes on the canyon's walls, rifts and waters in Porter's color plates, here accompanied by quotations from Thoreau, Loren Eiseley, Owen Wister, Wallace Stegner and others. The assemblage of "carved walls, royal arches, glens, alcove gulches, mounds and monuments" that Porter calls "the Colorado's masterwork" was discovered by John Wesley Powell in 1869. Porter mourns a vanished river passage that "mirrors pink rocks and cerulean sky" and in whose narrow chasms "streams of melted gems flow over purple sands." Though imperceptible in its original state, Glen Canyon on these picture-pages persists and is fittingly commemorated. (February Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Contents The Exploration of Glen Canyon Preface to the 2000 Edition The Living Canyon The Place The Idea Afterword Since Glen Canyon Dam--A Changed Landscape The Geology of Glen Canyon The Glen Canyon Community References Annotated Bibliography of Glen Canyon --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

the book was much smaller than I expected...but I'm still glad I bought it...

groovy

I've hiked and traveled this country in recent years. I first traveled through it when a youth (19-1954), awed but not truly understanding what I was seeing. This book, along with Tad Nichols' ""Images of a Lost World" will drive home the point of what has been lost. It can't be recovered, even if the dam were to come down, or at a minimum, be drained, but these two books will make the argument for ending it and starting some sort of resurrection. If you look at these pictures you will understand the imperative.

The Glen Canyon dam flooded possibly the most amazing stretch of the Colorado River. This book is a monument to "things lost." The photographs and text of places now under water are haunting in the least. I highly recommend it if you are at all interested in the American Southwest in general and the Colorado River region specifically.

A beautiful and informative book by an outstanding photographer. Many people have regretted the flooding of Glen Canyon.

I got a copy of Eliot Porter's Glen Canyon book after reading Edward Abbey's "Desert Solitaire," a chapter of which is devoted to a downriver rafting trip along this stretch of the Colorado River just before the dam was built. While Abbey's descriptions are vivid, I wanted to see with my own eyes what he was describing. And Porter's camera is the closest you can get to doing that today. His pictures are, of course, not the real thing, but they are about as breathtaking as photography can be. The colors, textures, reflections, and the play of light and shadow are wonderful, and each photograph is distinctly different. His own description of the canyon's display of color and light in the introductory essay "The Living Canyon" give an instructive insight into the eye of the photographer. His awareness of what he is looking at and his ways of choosing to look help the reader to see even more in the 80 photographs that follow. While some of the photographs capture the monumental scale of the canyon walls and formations, many focus on the myriad surfaces that are revealed to the eye: erosion patterns, lichen, rippling water flow, the dark streaking mineral stains extending from seeps, the rough texture of weathered sandstone in glancing sunlight, smooth river stones, the

layered stripes of exposed sediment, the trickling spread of water falling from overhead springs, the hanging tapestry coloration of the walls, whorled and striated rock, dry sand. There are also photographs of plants: moonflower, maidenhair fern, willow, tamarisk, redbud, columbine, cane. Above all, there is the rich array of colors, capturing a great variety of moods and attitudes. Porter was recognized for his photography of birds, and while there are no birds visible in these photographs, his introductory essay makes mention of them, and when looked at with that awareness, many of the pictures also seem to capture a sense of "air space" for flight. Before turning to photography, Porter was a Harvard professor of biochemistry and bacteriology, and it's interesting to see the somewhat dispassionate eye of the scientist in the way he uses the camera. While the story of Glen Canyon may induce sorrow or anger, the photographs are strong for their lack of sentimentality. The pictures also excite a curiosity about the geology of the river, and the book concludes with a short essay describing how the canyon walls reveal the geological ages that have gone into forming this part of the earth, going back millions of years. The book also includes a catalog of all the plants and animals that inhabited Glen Canyon before its inundation. Altogether, with its quotes from other writers, including Loren Eiseley, Joseph Wood Krutch, Wallace Stegner, and members of John Wesley Powell's expedition in the 19th century, this book is a fitting record of a great lost national treasure.

I missed Glen Canyon by about five years. By the time I first visited the area in 1968, it was Lake Powell. I was eighteen years old and I thought the ultramarine lake spreading through all that red rock was pretty cool. Having been born and raised in Pennsylvania, I did not have the experience or imagination to realize that what had been submerged by the dam and the lake was much more beautiful, more extraordinary, more magical and mystical. This book was part of my education. Its raison d'être is 77 color plates taken by Eliot Porter during seven or eight trips to the Glen Canyon in the 1960's. Glorious as they are, they still comprise only feeble documentation of the beauty, magic, and mystery that was sacrificed to the then-prevailing mindset of re-shaping the earth via grand-scale technology in the name of amorphous Progress. Even now, almost fifty years later, the photographs are worth a trip to the library or purchase of this book. The colors are rich and vibrant, sometimes seemingly psychedelic. The thoughts kept crossing my mind: "Do such images really exist on this planet?" (or, more properly in most cases, "Did they really exist once upon a time?"), and "What an incredible eye Porter had!" But THE PLACE NO ONE KNEW is not perfect. The photos are on every other page, on the right-hand page of each two-page spread. On the facing left-hand page there is a quotation from such luminaries of the West and/or the conservation

movement as Wallace Stegner, Henry David Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, Loren Eiseley, and William O. Douglas. (My favorite is the one from Frank Waters borrowed for the title of this review.) If a reader were to come across these quoted passages in their original context, many would indeed be noteworthy. Isolated and then strung together, however, they have been politicized and commercialized and they become precious and sappy. Also, for a book that purports to be a memorial of sorts to the now-defunct Glen Canyon, there are two odd things about the photos themselves. One is that some of the photos were taken OUTSIDE the area that was submerged. The other is that the photographs are so rich in color and many are so abstract (they are shot or cropped so that most are not obviously landscapes) that they have an otherworldly, almost timeless, immortal feel. While that is part of their grandeur and beauty, as a group they don't have the elegiac feel of the black-and-white photos of Tad Nichols, as published in "Glen Canyon: Images of a Lost World." Thus, in the end, the book seems at bottom to be a collection of "art" photographs (not documentary photographs) assembled and marketed under a political conservationist banner.

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