



Early Tourist Experiences In the Southwest

Introduction

At the end of the nineteenth century, many Americans either had never heard of the Grand Canyon or knew little about it. Although the Canyon had been explored, including by John Wesley Powell in 1869 and 1871, it did not immediately become one of America's most famous natural features (Weigle and Babcock 1996). If few Americans knew of the Grand Canyon, even fewer contemplated traveling to see it. Getting to the Grand Canyon was not a simple matter, particularly if one lived in the East. The journey required taking a succession of trains westward, which eventually deposited the tourist in the small town of Williams, Arizona. The intrepid traveler then had to find passage on a stagecoach a further distance of seventy miles, finally arriving at the Canyon after a dusty, bumpy ride. In the course of the twentieth century, the situation changed dramatically. The Grand Canyon became an American icon, a destination that millions of tourists came to visit each year. Instead of taking the railroad, later tourists drove their own automobiles to the Canyon, over paved roads and interstates, stopping at fast food and motel chains along the way. Tourists did not only visit the Canyon but a variety of sites—the Alamo; Tombstone, Arizona; Casa Grande National Monument; Zion National Park—all located in a region invariably described in tourist brochures as the “Land of Enchantment.”

These changes did not occur by accident. Even as the stagecoach left Williams for the Grand Canyon on a summer day in 1900, many of the characteristics of Southwestern tourism already were developing. Two entities in particular played an influential role in the process—the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe Railroad and the Fred Harvey Company. The Santa Fe, through its promotional advertisements, created an image of the Southwest designed to appeal to tourists. The “Land of Enchantment” was a romanticized landscape. According to the tourism industry, the Southwest not only included awe-inspiring, unusual scenery such as the Grand Canyon or the Painted Desert but exotic inhabitants as well in the persons of Native Americans and Hispanos. The Harvey Company also popularized this image as it constructed a national chain of restaurants and hotels. The Harvey Company was one of the pioneers of a format that became integral to the tourism industry—the comfort of finding a familiar, trusted brand in a strange place (Weigle and Babcock 1996; Shaffer 2001).

OVERVIEW



PHOTO COURTESY GRAND CANYON NP #9465

A Santa Fe train pulls into the station at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, c. 1940s.

In the 1920s with the growth in automobile ownership, the tourism industry blossomed. The automobile provided millions of Americans with an affordable means of transportation and coincided with a rise in the standard of living and the spread of paid vacations. More and more middle- and upper-class Americans were able to become tourists, and an infrastructure developed to support the rush of people in their automobiles traveling across the country. Roads were built and paved, gas stations clustered along highways, and motels and restaurants followed them. Even as people enjoyed modern conveniences, they also worried about the consequences of modernity. For many tourists, the Southwest represented an antidote to the ills of modern life. The white middle- and upper-class Americans who visited the Southwest depicted Native American cultures as primitive and timeless, untouched by modernity. This stereotype ignored the realities of Native American experiences, but it provided tourists with the images and encounters they wanted to have on their travels. Purchasing a Navajo blanket or watching a Hopi dance at a pueblo became a way for tourists to introduce what they saw as an element of authenticity into their lives. Despite the reality of racial conflict and contention, the tourism industry presented tourists with a harmonious, tri-cultural society of Anglo, Indian, and Hispanic, emphasizing the ethnic authenticity of the latter two groups, particularly Native Americans. This tri-cultural patina became as deeply embedded in the tourist landscape as the roads, motels, and gas stations (Shaffer 2001; Rodriguez 2003).





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A Harvey employee at the Grand Canyon, dressed in the uniform of the Harvey Girls, c. 1910.

The Santa Fe/Harvey Co. Partnership

In the 1890s, the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe Railroad decided to move beyond cargo hauling and make their passenger service a major focus of the company. In order to attract passengers, the Santa Fe needed to advertise the sites of the Southwest. The model of corporate tourism followed by the Santa Fe involved the creation of marketable attractions. Through advertising, the Santa Fe promoted the Southwest as a region that tourists should visit. The Santa Fe hired artists, such as Thomas Moran, who painted images of the region's landscapes and inhabitants, which were then reproduced in brochures, playing cards, and calendars and distributed across the nation. Moran's work captured vast landscapes like the Grand Canyon, which, thanks to the railroad's efforts, became an icon of America, a "must-see" for tourists. Other artists depicted the Native Americans and Hispanos of the region. Usually, they were presented as both exotic and primitive, living simple lives virtually unchanged by the anxieties of modern life. This stereotype appealed to the romantic sensibilities of an industrializing nation. Native American symbols, arts, and crafts became a staple of the tourist industry and perennially popular souvenirs (Weigle and Babcock 1996).

The Fred Harvey Company joined the Santa Fe in developing the tourism industry of the Southwest. The businessman Fred Harvey started his company in 1876 when he opened a restaurant in the Santa Fe's Topeka, Kansas depot. Quickly, Harvey began opening other restaurant/hotel combinations, known as Harvey Houses, along the railroad's route. The Harvey Company developed into the first large restaurant chain in the nation. For tourists, a Harvey House was synonymous with good food, comfortable lodging, and friendly service (Weigle and Babcock 1996; Poling-Kempes 1989).

Together, the Santa Fe and the Harvey Company constructed a series of hotels in the Southwest, including several on the rim of the Grand Canyon. El Tovar, designed by the architect Charles F. Whittlesey, opened in 1905. El Tovar combined elements of a Swiss Chalet with Navajo rugs and animal trophies—a mix of styles that harkened to the tourist resorts of the Alps as well as the Southwest. At the same time that Whittlesey was designing El Tovar, the architect Mary Colter oversaw the construction of the Hopi House. Built next to El Tovar, the Hopi House was both a museum and a sales venue. A number of Hopi Indians lived in the building which was fashioned in the shape of a pueblo. The Hopi wove clothing, baskets, and made pottery while observed by tourists. All of the items were also available for purchase (McQuaid and Bartlett 1996).



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Tourists in front of the El Tovar hotel at the Grand Canyon in 1920.

Tourist brochures popularized an image of Native Americans in the Southwest as primitive, simple people. The depiction "emphasized the exotic and foreign nature of the landscape" (Shaffer 2001). The Southwest was depicted as America's Orient and an air of exoticism enveloped the region. White tourists could envision themselves as adventurers and amateur ethnologists, positioned as superior to Native Americans and Hispanos. But although their supposed cultural superiority was acknowledged, Anglos also went to the Southwest seeking an escape from modern life. In the lives of Native Americans, tourists sought for an authenticity that middle- and upper-class white Americans feared was being lost in their modernizing society. Ethnic authenticity became a marketable commodity. At the Hopi House, the Hopi were on display as much as their craftsmanship. Colter attempted to make the structure an accurate depiction of Hopi architecture. But although Colter went so far as to use willows, plastered with mud, in the roof, the building also incorporated electricity, glass windowpanes, and an interior staircase. The Hopi House was built for tourists who came there to view "real" Native Americans

doing “authentic” activities. Yet the presence of the tourists and Hopi House itself showed that Native Americans were not part of an unchanging world but existed very much in the present (Shaffer 2001; McQuaid and Bartlett 1996).

The growth of automobile ownership in the 1920s changed the tourism industry, and the Harvey Company attempted to capitalize on the new opportunities. The Harvey Company began using touring cars to take people on trips around the Grand Canyon. It also started its popular Indian Detours business. On a guided tour, tourists traveled in chauffeured cars to a variety of sites, including both prehistoric ruins and inhabited pueblos. White women, bedecked in silver and turquoise jewelry, acted as guides on the Indian Detours. Like previous tourist promotions, the Indian Detours showcased both the environment and the inhabitants of the Southwest as exotic and primitive (Weigle 1996).



Guides on the Indian Detours, 1927.

The Depression ended the Indian Detours, and the rise of the automobile pushed the Santa Fe out of the tourism business. But over a period of forty years, the Santa Fe and the Harvey Company had created the image of the “Land of Enchantment.” They had turned tourism into a big business in the Southwest. The following three first-hand accounts from tourists showcase tourism at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the railroad was supreme, through an intermediary period when the automobile began to grow in popularity, to the end of the 1920s, when more and more people were taking long trips in their automobiles across the country. These tourist narratives reveal how deeply the images and stereotypes popularized by the Harvey Company and the Santa Fe affected the experiences of tourists.

The Land of Enchantment

In 1906 Lilian Whiting published a book entitled *The Land of Enchantment* that described her experience as a tourist in the Southwest. Whiting was a professional writer and also worked as the literary editor for the *Boston Traveler*. She had the financial means to take a trip to the Southwest that lasted several weeks and included staying in luxurious accommodations such as El Tovar at the Grand Canyon. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the majority of travelers to the Southwest, particularly those coming from the East, came from the upper classes. The Santa Fe and Harvey Company catered to the well-heeled tourist and emphasized the pleasures of a comfortable Pullman railroad car or the grandeur of hotels like El Tovar.

Whiting directed her remarks to people traveling from the East. She started her journey at Chicago, where she boarded a train heading for the Southwest. “As the trains leave in the evening the traveler fares forth in the seclusion of his berth in the Pullman,” she wrote. “The nights on a sleeping-car may be a very trance of ecstasy to one who loves to watch the panorama of the skies. Raise the curtain, pile up the pillows to the angle that one can gaze without lifting the head, and what ethereal visions one is wafted through! One has a sense of flying in the air among the starry spaces.” She assured her fellow travelers that “the splendidly equipped trains of the Santa Fe service admit very little dust; the swift motion keeps up a constant breeze, and some necromancy of perpetual vigilance surrounds the traveler with exceptional cleanliness and personal comfort.” As one traveled through the Southwest, Whiting stated that there was one feature of “first importance to the tourists, and this is the line of artistic and beautiful hotels built after the old mission design, the architecture felicitously harmonizing with the landscape,—those Harvey hotels built in connection with the Santa Fe stations at principal points... all of which are conducted with a perfection of cuisine and service that is rarely equaled.” Whiting’s prose often sounded as though it came directly from an advertisement for the Santa Fe or Harvey Company. Many tourist narratives consciously echoed the effusive, glowing language of tourist brochures.

In June, Whiting visited the Petrified Forest National Monument in Arizona. The monument was created the same year that Whiting traveled there, 1906, and few facilities for visitors existed. The Santa Fe dropped Whiting off at the town of Adamana—consisting of “a water tank, the station, and two bungaloes.” In order to reach the monument, Whiting needed to find other means of transportation. “To leave the comfortable ease of a Pullman sleeper at the witching hour of five in the morning to stop over at Adamana and visit the Petrified Forest requires a degree of fortitude beyond that usually calculated,” Whiting wrote. John Muir, the well-known naturalist, had spent the winter of 1905-1906 at Adamana, and one of his daughters,

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A stagecoach transporting tourists along the rim of the Grand Canyon.

Wanda Muir, took Whiting out to the Petrified Forest in a wagon drawn by horses. No visitor center existed, but Whiting warned readers that “the tourist is not allowed to carry away specimens *carte blanche*, as formerly. The Petrified Forests are now a government reservation.” Considerable latitude existed in defining appropriate tourist behavior, however, for Whiting went on to note that “small specimens, within a reasonable amount, are permitted the tourist as souvenirs...he may still be permitted a beautiful cross-section of an entire tree trunk.”

From the Petrified Forest, Whiting traveled to the Grand Canyon. It took six hours from Adamana to reach Williams, Arizona where a spur branch of the railroad went out to the Grand Canyon. Whiting noted that only five years before, the Grand Canyon could only be reached by a stage ride of seventy miles. On her trip, though, “the hour of waiting at Williams [for the train] is made a delight by a most unique and interesting curiosity shop under the splendid Harvey management, where all kinds of natural curiosities and Indian and Mexican things are shown. The walls are hung with bright-hued blankets and rugs, the ceiling is decorated and draped, easy-chairs and sofas abound, and these tend to make the journey a kind of royal progress.” Upon reaching the Canyon, she effused that “when the sun shines in splendor on the vermilion walls, the glory is almost beyond what man can bear. When from the trail below a star seems to float in the air and rest on the verge of the cliff, what words can convey an image of this ineffable beauty?” Many other tourists besides Whiting claimed that words could not express the splendor of the Grand Canyon—and then went on to employ long strings of superlative adjectives anyway. She described the Hopi Indians at the Hopi House as “quaintly garbed” and noted that Navajos and Supais also came to “sell their handiwork,—that of pottery, silver ornaments, blankets, and baskets.”

Written during a time when the “See America First” campaign was in full swing, Whiting’s narrative praised the Southwest as the ideal tourist destination. Many upper-class Americans visited Europe on their holidays, but Whiting urged them to stay in America and visit the Southwest. The Native Americans Whiting encountered were depicted as “quaint” and peaceful curiosities, their handcrafts suitable souvenirs. The strong correlation between Whiting’s prose and the advertisements of the Santa Fe reveals how swiftly and thoroughly the discourse of the Land of Enchantment had penetrated American culture.

Our Unknown Southwest

Agnes Laut traveled through the Southwest in 1913 and described her journey in *Through Our Unknown Southwest*. Like Whiting, Laut exhorted her fellow Americans to “See America First.” Unlike Whiting, Laut focused on the frugal tourist, carefully noting the prices for lodging and transportation and offering suggestions for economical vacations. She highlighted the possibilities of the national forests as recreational playgrounds. “In America, we have foolishly come to regard National Forests as solely allied with conservation and politics,” Laut argued. “National Forests stand for much more. They stand for a national playground and all that means for national health and sanity and joy in the exuberant life of the clean out-of-doors.”

Laut traveled to the national forests using a combination of the railroad and wagons. One could find a room at a small hotel in a town near the national forest for ten dollars a week. Or the tourist could rent a team of horses and a tented wagon. Laut advised buying a cheap khaki suit to wear and a yellow cowboy slicker. A tin box, called a “grub box,” protected food. A tourist could use a rolled rubber mattress, but Laut preferred “a piece of twenty-five cent oilcloth laid over the slicker on hemlock boughs, fur rug over that, with suit case for pillow, and a plain gray blanket.” A few mentions of automobiles also appear—Laut noted that one could “motor” into the forests from a railroad depot for \$4 an hour.

Laut also visited the Grand Canyon and offered the prospective tourist several options. “You can do the Canyon cheaply, or you can do it extravagantly. You can go to it by driving across the Painted Desert, 200 miles; or by motoring in from Flagstaff—a half-day trip; or by train from Williams...Or you can take your own pack horses, and ride in yourself....Once you reach the rim of the Canyon, you can camp under your own tent roof and cater your own meals. Or you may go to the big hotel [El Tovar] and pay \$4 to \$15 a day.”

In describing the Native Americans she encountered, Laut relied on stereotypical images. She positioned herself and other tourists as amateur ethnologists. “If you take to studying native Indian life, at Laguna, at Acoma, at Taos, you will find

yourself in such a maze of the picturesque and the legendary as you cannot find anywhere else in the wide world but America.” According to Laut, Native Americans were exotic, “brightly clad and picturesque as Arabs.” Laut was very critical of instances where she believed the “authenticity” of the Indians was being compromised. She described the pueblo of Isleta as “a white-man edition of Hopi type....The gorgeous skirts and shirts seen on the figures moving round the doors are nothing more nor less than store calico in diamond dyes. In the true Hopi pueblo, these garments would be...home-woven, vegetable-dyed fabric...” Such descriptions served to trap Native Americans in the past and deny them the status of intelligent, rational beings capable of living in the present. Only in their “primitive” state were they admirable objects in the tourist gaze—any taint of modernity invited scorn.

Laut employed many of the same descriptive tropes as Whiting, praising the region’s environment as breathtakingly beautiful. “The light bathes the sandy, parched mesas and the purple mountains girding the plains around in yellow walls flat topped as if leveled by a trowel, with here and there in the distant sky-line the opal gleam as of a snow peak immeasurably far away” she wrote in one verbose passage. Her descriptions also reveal the growth of the tourism infrastructure in the Southwest in the span of a few years. “You can motor now from Texas to Wyoming,” Laut informed her readers, or “motor West past the southern edge of the Painted Desert” and on to the Grand Canyon. More transportation options were available. Recreation was expanding into new areas, such as the national forests. Laut set herself apart from the promotions of the Santa Fe, deliberately shunning expensive hotels and restaurants. But she still employed the descriptive powers of the Land of Enchantment, set in place by the tourism industry.



A 1929 auto-camping rig.

PHOTO COURTESY GRAND CANYON NP #6823

Roads to Roam

In 1928, Hoffman Birney, a novelist who lived in Tucson, Arizona, set off on a 7,250 mile trip in his Chevrolet roadster, nicknamed “Betsy,” and wrote about the experience in *Roads to Roam*. Although occasionally he stayed at a hotel or an auto camp, he also brought along a bedroll and many nights simply stopped his car wherever he happened to be and slept on the ground. As automobile ownership soared, auto-camping became a popular pastime. Some auto-camping rigs were far more elaborate than Birney’s and included a shelter or tent, a stove, and numerous items of equipment. Birney did not take much with him but did advise that “a shovel is a mighty handy thing to have along on the back roads where sand is deep and abundant and you might wait three days for a friendly fellow-motorist to come along and offer to tow you out.” Driving over sand, where the road consisted of little more than a set of tire tracks, was an adventure in and of itself. “There’s only one way to drive that sand,” Birney cautioned. “Hit it hard, wide open, with all the speed you can muster in the short space available. The second the car hesitates, the instant you feel the sand clutching at your wheels, shove into second and give it the gun once more.” Birney rarely encountered the paved roads that tourists enjoy today.

When Birney visited the Grand Canyon, he traveled the entire way to the rim in his auto. “Possession of your own car, the ability to direct your own trips and plan your own time is of inestimable advantage,” Birney enthused. “Drive out to the various points and there sit a while and let your eyes range back and forth and up and down. Slowly a realization of the vastness of that chasm will come to you.” Birney neatly captured the essential difference between the railroad and the automobile—greater freedom of movement and the ability to conduct a trip when and where the tourist desired. Birney wrote that “the splendors of the Grand Canyon are as well exploited as any national park in America. The A.T.&S.F. Railroad—or, rather, the Fred Harvey Co. which is one and the same thing—has a monopoly on every amusement, the use of every trail, the horses or mules you ride, the food you eat, and the water with which you fill your radiator.”

Although a car offered greater freedom of movement, amenities and roads had not caught up to the growth of automobile ownership. The roads Birney followed were narrow and unpaved, and in some places, the going could get rough. “Somewhere in America there may be—I say there may be—three hundred miles of road worse than that between Cortez, Colorado, and Tuba, Arizona. There may be, but I doubt it; and I know I would not wish to drive it.” Birney related that “between the two towns named there are stretches now and then were one can open up to thirty miles an hour and hold that terrific speed for perhaps a mile before being forced to shut down on account of deep sand.” Here, Betsy



PHOTO COURTESY GRAND CANYON NP, #6798

Traveling the roads of the Southwest in the 1920s could be an adventure, as this tourist discovered.

met her downfall when Birney tried to cross an arroyo after a rainstorm. “Betsy rolled down the grade and made the hub-deep ford without difficulty. I shifted into second and gave her the gun for the climb out to the more level ground.” But the earth underneath gave way, and Betsy slid backward and got stuck in the middle of the arroyo. Help had to be sent for and finally two Buicks pulled Betsy out.

Birney, too, valorized Native Americans for their, in his mind, primitive, authentic life-ways. Where modernity intruded, Birney criticized. “The Pueblo Indians of New Mexico are woefully over-civilized and commercialized. The Harveycars have introduced them to the great and gullible American tourist, and it is the tourist who pays and pays and pays [for souvenirs].” Birney was critical of both the Native Americans and his fellow tourists. In the commercialism of the transaction, he saw the modern life he wanted to escape. Ironically, Birney was able to take his journey thanks to an emblem of modernity—the automobile—but did not recognize the contradictions in his viewpoint.

An Enduring Legacy

RVs and Toyotas have replaced train cars and roadsters. Tourists enjoy horseback riding as a leisure activity as opposed to a means to reach their destination. Tents are nylon and aluminum instead of canvas stretched over a wagon. Despite many changes in tourist experiences in the Southwest over the twentieth century, many of the characteristics of the Southwestern tourism industry that developed during the early decades of the century remain. People still visit the Grand Canyon, the Painted Desert, Taos—all sites promoted as “must-see” destinations by the Santa Fe. Xanterra Parks & Resorts, the company that currently manages concessions for many National Park Service sites, including the Grand

Canyon, is the corporate successor to the Fred Harvey Company. It acquired the Harvey Company in 1968 and continues to operate many of the historic hotels. Tourists can still spend the night in El Tovar, perched on the rim of the Grand Canyon.

The Hopi House no longer operates, but subtler forms of the racial stereotypes of the early tourist industry continue to occur. For example, the Indian Arts and Crafts Act, passed in 1990, mandates that all hand-made Indian arts and crafts marketed as such must be produced by “real” Native Americans. The act’s definition of who can claim Native American heritage confines people into an identity controlled by an outside entity that bases decisions on the controversial system of federally recognized tribes. For artists, their ethnic identity matters just as much as, if not more than, their actual artwork. Tourists continue to seek authenticity and an escape from modernity in the souvenirs they purchase and the tours they take of occupied pueblos, just like the tourists on the Harvey Company’s Indian Detours in the 1920s (Dilworth 2003).

The Santa Fe and Harvey Company dominated the Southwestern tourism industry in the early 1900s. Together, they created a romantic image of the region, depicting its inhabitants and environment as exotic and primitive, a “Land of Enchantment.” This discourse, disseminated throughout the nation, had tremendous power. Many tourists, such as Lilian Whiting or Agnes Laut, used the same language and images in their own travel narratives. And the discourse continues to influence the tourism industry and tourists’ experiences in the Southwest today.

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Verkamp's Curio Store, built in 1905, located east of the Hopi House at the Grand Canyon.