Rainbow Bridge. . . In the Mountain Chant the Navajo god Hast-zé-yalté is represented as making a rainbow bridge for the hero to walk on.

RAINBOW TO YESTERDAY

The John and Louisa Wetherill Story

by

MARY APOLLINE COMFORT

"Well I remember and always will
John and Louisa Wetherill."
Witter Bynner
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worldly possessions to dispose of as she saw fit, and his people happily accepted this arrangement. Louisa had all the stock-horses, cattle, sheep, and goats, brought to the trading post so that she might count them, as well as the jewelry, blankets, saddles, and other personal effects. Then she set about dividing the estate.

The cattle she gave to Hoskinini-begay, although sons do not by tribal law inherit; the many sheep she gave to the thirty or more Ute slave women who had so faithfully herded the animals for years. The horses, blankets, jewelry, and other belongings she apportioned among all of his clan as fairly as she knew how. His people said that as his "granddaughter" she should also inherit something, so as a memento of the old chief, Louisa kept his gun and saddle.

In her distribution of the estate, Louisa made one mistake. It was not long before the Ute women were in trouble. Having always been slaves and never on their own, they did not know how to manage their flocks and were giving their sheep away. The Tachini told her that the Ute women were her slaves just as they had been the chief's. She was horrified and told them she wanted no slaves. However, realizing that these women had become her responsibility to feed and care for, she had hogans built near the post for their use, and they looked to her for direction in their comings and goings.

And so the bonds between Louisa and The Diné became ever closer and stronger.

NOTES

1. Louisa Wetherill, Notebook No. 7.
2. Louisa Wetherill, Notebook No. 7.

Chapter VIII

The Ancient Ones
(1906–1910)

Long ago when the Tachini first lived in this land, so the legend went, they were joined by some of the people who had been living in Canyon de Chelly and had been forced by drought to leave. The tribe, which had been living in stone houses high in the cliffs above the Mancos Rivec for protection from marauding tribes, was forced by drought to move on also. These two tribes built houses in the valleys, and they were too busy eking out an existence to wage wars. These were the Tsegi-Etso from de Chelly in the valley and the Mesa people at the foot of Navajo Mountain. Eventually, there was war, and both groups moved into the rough Tsegi Canyon where the de Chelly people built their dwellings under the cliff, later to be known as Betatakin, while the others constructed those called Kiet Siel.[1] Speaking different languages, the tribes did not mingle.

More droughts and storms brought hardship to the increased population, which had been weakened by inbreeding within their own tribe and by starvation. They finally decided to leave the stern fastnesses of the Tsegi[2] and its side canyons. They were met by the Tachini who were shocked by the debilitated condition of these people, whom they knew but had not visited for some time. This made the Tachini realize that living to themselves and marrying within their own tribe was not good, and they began

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to steal girls from other tribes and the Pueblos to infuse new blood strains into their lineage. The two tribes who had left the Tsegi grew stronger, finally joined forces, and later moved to Oraibi and became known as the Hopis.[3]

As Louisa heard additional legends from Wolfkiller about the ancestors of these people who now lived in the desert, she wondered more and more about the ancient habitations high in the cliffs which were mentioned in the tales. John was probing deeper and deeper into the forbidding defiles of the Tsegi, where, in December 1894 Richard and Al Wetherill and Charlie Mason on an expedition for the American Museum of Natural History in New York, had discovered the Kiet Siel ruins.[4] Working their way up Kayenta Creek and Laguna Canyon, they had found many other ruins including Poncho House and Swallow's Nest, but they did no digging on this trip.

Richard did not return there until the fall of 1896, when he was accompanied by a young man named Whitman whose mother had financed the expedition. They came in by way of Grand Gulch, where the Basket Makers civilization had been discovered in 1892; they photographed and mapped the larger ruins en route, but did little work at Kiet Siel. In March 1897, Theodore Bower financed Richard Wetherill on an exploratory trip on which photographs, maps, and notes were made of Kiet Siel, and the artifacts found were turned over to the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

Out from Oljato, John was exploring in the Tsegi, finding smaller ruins, such as Alcove House and Ladder House, and he returned to the area around Navajo Mountain again and again looking for evidences of the Ancient Ones. Knowing of his interest in such exploration and of Louisa's sympathetic reception of the old legends of their people, The Diné began more and more to give bits of information about some great stone house in a mysterious cave high up in a rocky cliff, a majestic rock arch seen only by a few, and other places sacred to their ancestors. It was during this time that the furor over the excavations at Chaco Canyon had resulted in the passage on June 6, 1906 of the Antiquities Act; Mesa Verde became a national park the same year.

In the summer of 1908, Byron Cummings and two of his students, Neil M. Judd and Clifton Lockhart, spent several weeks, with John as guide, exploring in the Tsegi, making their headquarters at Oljato. For three years previously, the Utah Archeological Society had been extremely interested in the wealth of archeological material in the San Juan–Grand Gulch region and had sent summer expeditions there to record and map the ruins, some of which had been sadly mistreated by vandals. Aiding in these explorations were Edgar L. Hewitt and A.V. Kidder.

The Sunday edition of the *Salt Lake Herald*, November 1, 1908, contained a full page story by Dr. Cummings with photos of his summer trip into the San Juan country. He wrote about the Wetherill-Colville trading post at Oljato, which was situated about 150 miles from any railroad in the middle of Navajo land. He seemed amazed that they were educated white people who spoke fluent Navajo and who were demonstrating by their deeds that they sincerely had the Indians' welfare at heart.

In June 1909, John outfitted Cummings's party, which included his son Malcolm and University of Utah students Neil Judd, Donald Beauregard, and Stuart Young, and they set out to rediscover the Kiet Siel ruins. Beauregard's account of this expedition acclaimed the discovery as of utmost importance in throwing light upon prehistoric Americans.[5] The previously discovered Cliff Palace at Mesa Verde had been regarded as unique, but this ruin was equally impressive, many miles away in a remote area, ten miles below the Utah line in Arizona.

It could be reached only leading a pack train over 200 miles of difficult terrain, often without sufficient graze for the pack animals; thus quite understandably it kept its secret through the centuries. As Beauregard stated: "The canyon in which it lies runs in an irregular half circle heading near Navajo Mountain running southeast and east into the ChinLee, finally empties into the San Juan River eighty miles above." So many pieces of broken pottery were found that the ruin was called that in Navajo—*Kiet Siel* (i.e. "broken pottery"). Cummings estimated that the dwelling could have easily accommodated 500 persons.

John, climbing high up on a cliff, found two names carved in the rock: "Richard Wetherill" and "Charlie Mason," irref-

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it can get a footing. The kivas are square while those at Kitsiel (sic) are round of the Mesa Verde type. There is a fine spring just under the ruins. The spring was found in 1910 by Dr. T. Mitchell Prudden, a scientist from Columbia College, New York.

W.R. Douglass of the United States Land Office in Washington, D.C. later looked the site over for a National Monument and mapped it, and Dr. J. Walter Fewkes of the Smithsonian Institution visited Betatakin in September, 1909, building a road up the canyon as far as the falls. In June, 1910, Dr. Prudden made the trip in a light wagon, but two weeks later the Fewkes road was washed out.

There was jealousy in the Smithsonian about the archeological work being done in the above area. Fewkes, after his return to Washington, stated in a lecture that he was the discoverer of Kiet Siel and Betatakin. Edgar L. Hewett of the School of American Research at Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Frederick W. Hodge were each zealous about conducting explorations. Dr. Cummings, when in Washington, D.C. in March, 1910, made an investigation regarding protection of the rights of himself and John to continue the work they had begun in Kiet Siel and Betatakin. He learned that there had been an arrangement between Hewett and Hodge, head of the Bureau of Ethnology, by which the American Institute and the Department of the Interior were to cooperate in the work in the Southwest and there would be no duplication of territory. Hewett assured Cummings that he and John would be able to finish Betatakin and also study Kiet Siel, as well as other portions of that region. This work could proceed when Cummings returned from abroad about April, 1911 and had obtained his permit to make excavations.[7]

More and more the archeological findings in the San Juan region of southwestern Utah and the western fringe of Monument Valley were opening up new vistas of conjecture about the prehistoric peoples of this wild, primitive country, much of which was being trod by the feet of white men for the first time. Scientists were vying with each other to be the first to discover yet another ancient habitation. Their academic frenzy was comparable to that of prospectors in a gold rush, as they sought the artifacts and amazing structures left behind by those mysterious, unknown people—The Ancient Ones.

NOTES

1. Various spellings: Keet Seel, Kietsiel, Kitsiel. Meaning "broken pottery" in Navajo.
2. Also *Segi*. Sometimes called Laguna Canyon.
3. Author's note: In the summer of 1968, Prescott, [Arizona] College archeology students digging on Black Mesa near Kayenta found artifacts dating back to 1100 A.D., making this the earliest known evidence of predecessors of the Hopis.
4. *Plateau*, January, 1955.
5. *Deseret Evening News*, August 28, 1939.
6. Byron Cummings, "Indians I have known," *Arizona Silhouettes*, 1952.
7. Letter, April 27, 1910, Cummings–Wetherill.

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