

THE GRAND CANYON IS ALREADY  
OVERRUN WITH TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE.  
TWO PROPOSED MEGA-DEVELOPMENTS  
THREATEN TO MAKE THE SITUATION WORSE.

# GRAND FOLLY



by Christopher Ketcham

**B**EFORE WE DESCENDED with our backpacks into the abyss, we honored the occasion by firing a pistol in the air. We were at the trailhead near Monument Point, on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, and we had the place to ourselves. The roads to Monument Point are dirt, there are no amenities — not even a “goddamn shitter,” as my buddy Jeremy pointed out — and most of the year access is impossible due to the high snows of the Kaibab Plateau. Therefore the people, bless them, are few, and backpackers with guns are free to be obnoxious.

Each year, 90 percent of the 4.6 million tourists who visit Grand Canyon National Park gather on the South Rim, which is more easily accessed and friendlier to the family in the sedan. This produces a condition of overcrowding that explains why, to a lover of wildness and solitude, the South Rim is such a wretched place to visit. The masses of sightseers are attracted to the amenities of overdevelopment, and the development expands to absorb the crowds. Like so many national park

gateways given over to the industrial-tourism model, the South Rim has become an embarrassment. It’s more accurate to call it a national *amusement* park, a place to cluster for the iconic views with an ice cream, a hot dog, and a wi-fi signal, then adjourn to the IMAX theatre to “discover 4,000 years of history in 34 minutes.”

The public conversation about the state of Grand Canyon National Park, and about our national parks in general, rarely touches on the issue of overcrowding. The reason is that most employees within the bureaucracy have bought into the idea that more visitation is always better, or have been forced to buy into this idea in order to keep a job. I think there are a lot more in this latter camp than we know, though they keep their dissent anonymous. One career ranger who worked at the Grand Canyon in the mid-1980s, when annual visitation was around 3 million, offered me her bleak assessment: “If you love a place, don’t make it a national park.”

Grand Canyon is being loved to death. There are too many cars

on the roads, too many people on the trails. The river is packed with rafters in the high season. The inner gorge is polluted with the noise of helicopter and airplane tours. Even the superintendent of the park, David Ueberuaga, whose job is to welcome the public, has expressed his concern. He says that during some of the most active days of visitation in 2014 the park’s eight entrance stations on the South Rim were backed up more than a mile with idling cars waiting to get in. He describes an “extraordinary” increase in day use. He notes that the result on the trails has been “human waste, trash, leftover clothes.” Backpackers have written him complaining that “it’s just gotten [to be] too much.”

The situation on the South Rim, already intolerable, could become exponentially worse in coming years. The National Park Service now finds the borders of the park, on the south and the east, threatened with two developments proposed by players in the industrial-tourism game who hope to increase the number of annual



visitors by millions. These are not pikers like the NPS, with its Xanterra contractors and its aging hotels and lousy restaurants. These are people with global capital to invest, big thinkers whose visions include a vast luxury mall on the very edge of the park.

It's hard to say which of the two proposed developments is more loathsome. My vote is the Grand Canyon Escalade, a joint project of a select few members of the Navajo leadership and a group of developers from the Phoenix area. The idea is to build a 420-acre complex of hotels and restaurants on the remote East Rim, on Navajo land at the edge of the wild empty mesa above the confluence of the Colorado and the Little Colorado Rivers, a site that is sacred to the Hopi, Navajo, and Zuni. The plan includes a 1.4-mile cable-car gondola strung from the rim to the canyon bottom, where the developers will install a raised riverside walkway and café. The gondola, running 365 days a year, is expected to carry between 4,000 and 10,000 people daily to honor the sacred spot by spending

money. The man behind the Escalade is R. Lamar Whitmer, a Scottsdale real estate consultant and managing partner of Confluence Partners LLC. What the canyon needs, he says, is infrastructure for easy access to the inner gorge. "The average person can't ride a mule to the bottom of the canyon," he told the *Los Angeles Times* last year. "We want them to feel the canyon from the bottom." According to Whitmer, the benighted folks at the park service offer only a "drive-by wilderness experience." (I had no idea what this meant, but Whitmer did not return phone calls and emails to clarify.)

The other development, no less hideous, would be situated at a village one mile to the south of the main park entrance, a narrow-eyed little place called Tusayan, population 558, the only settlement amid a sea of national forest. For decades, motels and trinket shops and restaurants in Tusayan (pronounced *too-zee-yan*) have fed on the blood of the traffic to the park — the town's only reason for being. Among its heroes of commerce is the self-made

millionaire Elling Halvorson, 83, who has been profiteering on the wonders of the Grand Canyon longer and more successfully than perhaps any other businessman in the American West. Halvorson's many tentacles include the local Best Western, the IMAX theatre, shopping centers in Las Vegas and Seattle, and various real estate companies. He is best known, however, as the pioneer of air tourism in the canyon. His most enduring and profitable enterprise, Papillon Airways, carries 450,000 customers a year as the sole "flightseeing" operation that flies the entire 277-mile length of the canyon.

Halvorson has partnered with a multibillion-dollar Italian conglomerate, Gruppo Stilo, to expand the village. The hopeful vision of Halvorson/Stilo includes 3 million square feet of commercial space, a five-star hotel, a spa, a dude ranch, a water park, and 2,200 new residential homes. Something called "Camper Village," envisioned as Tusayan's new downtown, will include "apartments, condominiums, live-work units, timeshares" and "an assortment

of food, beverage and entertainment options,” as the developers explain in a zoning application. The homes and rental properties at a proposed “TenX Ranch” will be designed, we are assured, to “showcase nature’s own natural splendor” — which, naturally, nature needs showcased. Not least, the sprawling new development will boast

monstrosity proceeding to full build-out is less certain. The US Forest Service will have to give its approval for building roads across public land to access the site, and an environmental impact review is just beginning. Conservation groups could end up suing in an attempt to kill the plan. “There are powerful interests promoting this development,”

Grand Canyon, named for the roar of its flow. The most common cause of death at the park is the failure to carry enough water, coupled with the heat and the unrelenting exposure to sun. These victims — 15 of them dead in the canyon from heat and dehydration between 2007 and 2011 — typically perish not on the hike in, but on the way out. Merrily they skip down from the South Rim in a pair of sandals and with a pint bottle of Evian. Checking in, but unable to check out.

Thirst is far worse than hunger and is a frightful way to die. I was feeling very thirsty when, after several hours of traversing the treeless benchlands, we topped a rise of rock, and from the immense silence came the sound of Thunder Spring. The water raged from a tiny cleft in a towering sandstone cliff — it issues at 240 gallons per second, according to the park service — and the torrent fed a green ribbon of life in the narrow canyon down which it tumbled. Maidenhair fern, hanging in beards on the cliff, shook in the breeze kicked up by the water, and a delicate mist fell soft as satin on the skin. It was November, and on the rim the wind had blown cold and the ground was dusted with snow. But now the afternoon was humid and warm and perfumed with the wet earth and the smell of moss amid the cottonwoods and the oaks and the willows. We stripped to our t-shirts, and camped that night beside the racing water, drinking without filtering it. Blessed is the land where you can still drink from the streams.

The megadrought now unfolding across the West will likely reduce the plenty of Thunder Spring. But, even under the worst regime of climate change, could the water disappear altogether? I doubt it. The Kaibab, with as much as 200 inches of snow a year, will still get its share of precipitation,

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## Draining the aquifer would be a crime against the park’s inhabitants. It would not, however, be a crime under the law.

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a “Native American Cultural Center” billed as a paragon of “edutainment.”

The proposals have generated a great deal of attention, most of it negative. Kevin Fedarko, a whitewater guide and author of a history of river running, *The Emerald Mile*, wrote an op-ed for *The New York Times* last summer that described the Grand Canyon as a “cathedral under siege.” David Nimkin, southwest regional director of the National Parks Conservation Association, told the *Los Angeles Times* that the projects represented “profound and enormous threats to the park.” He has called the Escalade “an unmitigated disaster.” In a January interview, Superintendent Ueberuaga told *Earth Island Journal* that the Tusayan project was “the obsession of a few wealthy foreign developers who want to have a Grand Canyon resort in their portfolio.”

Pending approval from the Navajo Tribal Council — which could come sometime this year — Whitmer hopes to begin construction on the Escalade by 2016 and to open for business in 2018. The prospect of the Tusayan

Sandy Bahr, the director of the Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club, told me. “The biggest obstacle is water. Stilo has yet to identify a water source. The access road will require National Environmental Policy Act analysis. The cumulative impacts are huge and should be reason enough to say no.”

**O**UR PLAN WAS TO BE gone five days, not as much time as I would have liked, but enough to get filthy and feel the rhythm of the land. We would follow a 30-mile loop, dropping 6,500 feet in elevation and tracing a series of geological stair-steps, winding steeply down cliffs, leveling off on arid benchlands, then dropping again for the final descent into the inner gorge.

We had no trouble finding a landscape empty of people. On our first day in the canyon, we saw no one, heard nothing but our own muttering and complaining. (We saw six other hikers during the entire trip.) Finding water was the concern. By the second day we were running out of it. Our goal was a re-supply at Thunder Spring, the second largest waterfall in the

and the animals and plants that depend on the spring for their survival in the desert will adapt to a strained supply.

I do know that on the South Rim there is now the possibility of the destruction of its springs and creeks and falls. According to NPS studies, full build-out of the Halvorson/Stilo plan could nearly quadruple water use at Tusayan during the next decade. The developers have not offered any feasibility study for their water needs, but an option left open under Arizona state law, one which the developers could exercise, is to mine without limit the South Rim aquifer, called the Redwall-Muav. The hydrology of the aquifer — its volume, its extent, its fragility — is not well understood. What is known is that the aquifer feeds the vast majority of springs on the South Rim. The National Park Service has found that the few wells already drilled at Tusayan to supply the small number of its residents have likely contributed to a 10 percent decline in the springs in the park in recent years. “We need a lot more information about how water extraction could potentially destroy these precious oases of biodiversity before more wells should be allowed,” Kevin Dahl of the National Parks Conservation Association told me.

A Gruppo Stilo spokesman, Andy Jacobs, said: “We’ve always said that we have the legal right to drop wells in Tusayan, which is where Tusayan gets its water currently. That’s not something we would like to do. Because, in the long run, Northern Arizona and the town should be off of groundwater. We want to deliver Colorado [River] water to Tusayan.” Jacobs said river withdrawals would be in the range of 600 acre-feet per year. Given that an average American family uses about half an acre foot of water annually, Jacobs’s estimates are inconsistent with



MAP SATELLITE IMAGERY: GOOGLE EARTH / TERRAMETRICS

the development plans, which call for thousands of new residences likely using far more than 600 acre-feet annually.

Let’s play out what might happen if Halvorson/Stilo did decide to tap the aquifer, fully justified under Arizona water law. Famous Havasu Creek is depleted, perhaps gone in a matter of years. So, too, Indian Garden and Hermit Creek, Cottonwood Creek and Salt Creek, Travertine Canyon and Sapphire Creek, Turquoise and Ruby and Serpentine Creeks. To erase these marvels from the land, to leave only barren rock where water once fed life in the canyon — where 80 percent of life in the canyon occurs — would of course be an act of terrific violence, a crime against the park’s inhabitants. It would not, however, be a crime under the law.

**O**NE DAY RECENTLY I called up Renae Yellowhorse, the spokeswoman and one of the lead organizers of a Navajo coalition called Save the Confluence, whose purpose is to stop the Grand Canyon Escalade project.

Yellowhorse, 54, is a member of the Deer Springs People of the Bitter Water Clan, who live at the western end of the Navajo Nation. Her clan includes in its myths the story of the birth of the world when the Little Colorado and the Colorado Rivers met at the bottom of the canyon. “The confluence is where our ancestors came from,” Yellowhorse told me. “It is the origins of the *Yéiichei*, the holy ones, the deities who walk daily, just as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. These are the stories that we, the people of the Western Navajo, were taught. Our tradition is an earth-based faith in the land, the air, the wind, the water, all the things that we were provided for by the holy deities, and for us to be stewards of.”

Yellowhorse said: “One of the arguments of the Confluence Partners is that nobody lives there at the confluence. The reason that nobody lives there is that we’re told as children, from a very young age, to go only with a specific reason. To say prayers. We’re told not to tarry on the canyon edge, not

to be loud. That's where the deities walk! Traditionally, this area was never claimed by any single tribe. The land belongs to the deities."

There are of course those among the Navajo whose god is economic development. It's an old dispute in the tribe. The "traditionalists" favor pastoralism, while the "moderns" want to exploit the land's riches, its coal and uranium. Now the investment portfolio turns to the sites of religious pilgrimage, which happen to have saleable viewsheds. The argument of the moderns is always the same: Development will bring the Navajo out of poverty and unemployment. Renae Yellowhorse, who has a bachelor's degree in business administration and is unemployed, does not agree that this sort of development should happen on sacred land.

**Confluence Partners** involves several Navajo politicians, including Albert A. Hale, president of the Navajo Nation from 1995 to 1998 and today a representative in the Arizona State Legislature. The current interim president of the Navajo Nation, Ben Shelly, is a proponent of the project. According to Yellowhorse, Shelly's advisors and other leaders of the tribe have made it a habit of meeting behind closed doors with the representatives of Confluence Partners. (Neither Hale nor Navajo Nation leadership responded to requests for comment.)

Meanwhile, the Navajo public is fed pablum. The lead architect for Confluence Partners, a man named



Mike Lee, sat with a wad of gum in his mouth before the Navajo Council last June. He told them that "today we're going to show you a film which is talking about the culture of the Hawaiian people and moreover the Polynesian people." It was supposed to be an example of the kinds of cultural productions Confluence Partners could make possible at the Escalade. "This is an IMAX film," Lee said. "Many of the things that you experience at the actual venue are different than we can portray here because the seats move, there

is water, there is a spray, there is smell, so on." He added, "As you look at the film, I hope you see some parallels, some similarities with the kinds of issues and problems that perhaps may concern you today."

Yellowhorse did not see the parallels. What she saw was a developer dismissing the Navajo as fools. Whitmer said not a word during the proceedings, but afterward met again, privately, with Ben Shelly.

**P**AUSE HERE TO CONSIDER the character and record of the people peddling the development plans around the canyon.

In the early nineties, R. Lamar Whitmer was found to have made \$40,000 in unauthorized payments to himself while chairman of the Maricopa County Sports Authority in Phoenix. He resigned from the post, though he was acquitted of criminal charges. Gruppo Stilo is an

arm of the Lombardy-based Percassi Group, a corporate consortium that builds luxury malls catering to the rich, runs Ferrari dealerships, and is involved in fashion retailers such as Billionaire (whose target clientele include "Hollywood stars, international rappers, Middle-East royalty"). *The Seattle Times* reports that Elling Halvorson has been accused of attempting to buy off elected officials in the Seattle area to further his business interests. Albert Hale resigned his position as president of the Navajo Nation in 1998 after it was revealed

he had spent \$5,000 in tribal funds on personal expenses, including tickets to a Merle Haggard concert. He was not indicted, and denied any wrongdoing.

The tale of the rise of Tusayan is similarly fraught with shady dealings. In 2000, voters in Coconino County shot down Grand Canyon area development plans in a referendum. Halvorson and Gruppo Stilo moved to game the system. First, they lobbied the Arizona Legislature to allow Tusayan to incorporate as a separate municipal entity, with control over its development freed from the grip of county government. The legislature, in 2003, dutifully did so. Once the town was incorporated in 2010, the developers stacked the newly elected city council with Halvorson's employees, following a campaign that the *High Country News* described as rife with allegations of voter fraud. Tusayan is now a true company town, run by Halvorson's men.

Gruppo Stilo spokesman Jacobs acknowledged that some city council members are employees of the Halvorson family, and said: "Well, it's certainly a company town. But if you talk to the council members, they will say that they are not beholden to anyone.... The town people make decisions based on what is best for the town, not what is best for Gruppo Stilo."

The new Tusayan Town Council had been seated for less than a year when, in November 2011, it voted to approve the Halvorson/Stilo plan.

**O**N OUR THIRD DAY Jeremy and I attempted to make it to the Colorado River. This turned into a fiasco. We were deep in the inner gorge and utterly alone. The trail, a thin ribbon among talus and scree next to a plummeting cliff, was badly exposed at least 500 feet above the river basin. We stopped, gathered our breath, and

looked down-canyon at the sight of the Granite Narrows. It comprises some of the oldest exposed stone known to man, the Vishnu Basement Rocks: black, strange, jagged, full of shadow.

"Well," Jeremy said, "bushwhack to the river?" I shrugged. There was nowhere else to go. We backtracked and scoped out a way down. It was a treacherous descent on a 60-degree slope of scree slippery as marbles, made doubly difficult by our packs. Twice I went down on my ass, sliding, the pack driving me along. Both times I dug my heels into the stone in an act of quiet terror, while Jeremy quoted German philosophers. He seemed to have no trouble.

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**"Traditionally, this area was never claimed by any single tribe."**

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Finally at the river, we made camp on a gloomy beach, the sun gone behind the rim though it was only afternoon. The air was chilly in the shadows, and we built a fire out of driftwood — a violation of park service regulations, but so be it. The fire burned high, and our shadows danced, and we stamped the ground like animals as the river murmured. We declared ourselves the luckiest, happiest men on Earth, having descended into the Grand Canyon by the mere locomotion of our miserable feet.

In the long night of late autumn we had plenty of time to discuss the ways to deal with overcrowding in the national park system. At last we agreed on a program of solutions for Grand Canyon. First, smash the tarmacked roads, turn them to dirt, add a few sand traps and about a thousand potholes

— make it as difficult as possible for people to get to the park. Blow up the IMAX theatre; film the explosion in IMAX if possible. Chainsaw the utility poles, cut off the electricity, and crash the cell phone towers with thermite. Tumble the El Tovar Hotel into the canyon stone by stone. (The hotel a landmark? No, *a mark on the land*.) Exile the for-profit concessions Xanterra and Aramark, capitalist parasites enjoying a free ride on the taxpayer dime. No more profits for the private sector on public lands. Get rid of the developed campgrounds, the picnic tables, the men's and women's bathrooms. Let the people shit in the unisex woods, as they should. It won't be a problem;

without the amenities, there will be far fewer people and a lot less shit. No more guides on the trails, no more mule-back journeys into the canyon. And no more search and rescue missions called in from iPhones. Enough diapering of the lazy tourists. They will be on their own, with foot power alone. The motto of the national parks should be *Keep Out the People Who Can't Rough It*.

**Y**OU'D EXPECT THE whitewater companies to be the good guys in this tale, the ones advocating for the preservation of the wildness of the river that carved the canyon. Not so. Affiliated under the cover of nonprofits that purport to advocate for public access, the guiding concessionaires comprise a powerful and corrupting private interest.

The National Park Service has

given these businesses their power, first off, by providing them a near-monopoly on permits to run the canyon. “The nation’s most vaunted stretch of white water,” writes Daniel McCool, a political scientist at the University of Utah, “has basically been leased ... to a few well-connected companies with strong political ties to the appropriate bureaucrats and politicians.” Two-thirds of all the people who raft down the Grand Canyon do so by paying outlandish sums to commercial operators. The remainder of the permits — the scraps in the cold season — is what the public gets. The guiding companies do pay a concession fee, but it is well below market value, according to McCool. The public subsidizes the private use of the commons.

The industry’s revenues — roughly \$30 million a year in the Grand Canyon alone — depend in part on the park service’s policy for the use of motors on whitewater rafts. Why this penchant for machines grinding and whining and spitting oil, polluting the air, the water, the silence? I asked this question of my friend John Weisheit, conservation director of the nonprofit Living Rivers, in Moab, Utah. Weisheit, a river guide turned conservationist, has guided at least 50 trips through the Grand, a quarter of them commercial and science-related. “It takes 14 days to do a Grand Canyon trip with oars,” he told me. “You can do it in half that time with a motor. You have less staff, and you can carry more clients. The profit margin is higher. It’s not about enjoying the Grand Canyon, it’s about doing it as quickly as possible with the least amount of overhead. It’s about creating an assembly line of humanity.”

Banning motors on boats in the Grand has been the goal of river advocates for 50 years. The commercial guide operators have always manned

the barricades in opposition. In 1969, 21 guiding companies formed the Colorado River Outfitters Association (CROA) for the purpose of keeping their motors in action and their profits high. When Congress passed the Grand

of deregulation. Senator Orrin Hatch, the Utah Republican, followed the Reagan victory with a Congressional amendment that prohibited the park service from spending any funds to enforce a management plan that would

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## “Every superintendent at Grand Canyon who has wanted to advance the cause of wilderness has been slapped down.”

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Canyon Enlargement Act in 1975, it required, to the horror of CROA, that the park service study the expanded park for wilderness values under the provisions of the Wilderness Act, which forbids the use of mechanized equipment in designated wilderness. Three years later, the service issued a river management plan that included a phase-out of motors.

This brought a furious response from the commercial operators, whose cause was championed by a rabid pro-business advocacy group called the Mountain States Legal Foundation (MSLF), founded in 1976 with an infusion of cash from right-wing beer magnate Joseph Coors. The MSLF, headed by a notorious enemy of conservation, James Watt, filed suit in 1980 on behalf of nine concessionaires to halt the motor phase-out. Luckily for the rivermen, President Ronald Reagan came to the rescue. Reagan, who won office in part on a platform that derided environmental protections as an impediment to business, appointed James Watt, hero of the commercial guides, as Secretary of the Interior. With the Republican takeover of the Senate in 1980, the environmental agenda of the 1970s disappeared down the toilet in the new era

reduce the number of motorized craft in the canyon. The senator’s cousin, Ted Hatch, was at that time one of the largest outfitters in the Grand.

“There have been no serious attempts to get rid of motors on the river since the Hatch Amendment of 1980,” says Jeff Ingram, a 78-year-old veteran canyoneer and river runner who has been a canyon watchdog for much of his life.. “The Park Service’s basic attitude now is that motors are legitimate.” Hatch and his staff over the years have squelched any effort by the Department of the Interior to create wilderness areas in the Grand, according to Ingram. “Every superintendent at Grand Canyon who wanted to advance the cause of wilderness has been warned off or even slapped down.”

**O**N THE FOURTH DAY, I was doing push-ups in the inner gorge, stripped naked in the sun, thinking what would happen if Glen Canyon Dam failed under the pressure, say, of a 200-year flood. The US Bureau of Reclamation says that a wave 40 stories high traveling as fast as 25 miles per hour would inundate the canyon. I wonder how many of Yellowhorse’s

deities would be involved in smashing the Grand Canyon Escalade to pieces in this scenario.

Jeremy and I had trekked from the river bottom early that morning to a stream called Deer Creek, and the plan was to load up on water and start the long climb out of the canyon in the afternoon. Deer Creek incises a mile of spectacular narrows in the 500-million-year-old Tapeats Sandstone before it debouches into the Colorado. A spur trail leads along a precipitous shelf of rock down to where the creek leaps from the Tapeats in a fall of several hundred feet. The creek water echoes in the narrows, and the noise is like a freight train.

Jeremy had hiked into the distance of the narrows and I waited behind. An hour passed, and then another. I began to worry for my friend. I imagined him at the bottom of the slot, his cries disappearing in the sound of the water. I thought of geological time: the land forever engulfing Jeremy's flesh. The beauty of the canyonlands, like all landscapes that inspire the emotion of the sublime, is its terribleness.

These thoughts were serious enough that I stopped doing push-ups. I rifled Jeremy's pack, got out his first-aid kit, filled my water bottles, found his supply of tequila (for me — I'd need it if he were really messed up), and wrapped 30 feet of rope around my chest in case I had to haul him to safety.

Just as I was about to set out he rounded a corner of the Deer Creek narrows, smiling like a lotus-eater. "Oh man, I thought you were coming! I was soaking my feet, it was amazing."

Momentarily I was annoyed with him. But I ended up scolding myself. *By god, what are you here for, Ketcham? What kind of a madman would demand a schedule in the Grand Canyon?* A guiding concessionaire, that's who!

We climb out of the canyon the next day, slowly and happily tackling the 6,000-foot ascent, chattering like schoolboys. About 500 feet from the rim, quite suddenly, we stop talking. Jeremy turns to me: "Bonking," is all he says. The temperature plummets, the wind blows. I'm dizzy, nauseated — it's the elevation, the sudden cold. I start to vomit.

The clouds open and the sun explodes its light. A hundred miles of cliff and mesa. The grandness of the Grand.

Jeremy summits the rim before I do, and when I find him at the car, his pack is tossed to the ground as if it had been biting him. He stands in a trance. His body appears to tremble. I grunt in salutation. He doesn't answer. "I'm high," he mutters. "Seeing Technicolor. Psychedelic. Spinning. Real strange. Never felt this way after a backpack. Even climbing fourteeners."

We conclude that it is an intoxication peculiar to the climb out of the Grand Canyon.

**A** DAY LATER, Jeremy was gone, making the long drive back to his family in California. I lingered for a week along the North Rim, on the national forest land of the Kaibab Plateau. Rumors of a wolf on the Kaibab had been circulating among forest rangers for months, and within three days of my emergence on the rim the US Fish and Wildlife Service, using genetic tests of the animal's scat, had confirmed the suspicions. It was a lone gray female from the packs of the Northern Rocky Mountains who had dispersed, likely across Utah, to find new territory. She had journeyed an estimated 450 miles by the time she settled on the Kaibab, where the pines are thick, the deer plentiful, the nights dark — ideal wolf habitat. I

heard her howl one evening at dusk in the last week of November, a voice at once sorrowful and lonely and full of strength.

A wolf had not been seen on the Kaibab in more than 70 years, though perhaps it was only a matter of time, and a little luck, that the packs of the Northern Rockies would find their way south. It was an astonishing event, a sign of hope, evidence of re-wilding. And it made me less depressed about the fate of the South Rim.

The Park Service has already done a favor for those of us who find no pleasure in industrial tourism: It has corralled the masses, regaled them as consumers of scenery, and kept them, for the most part, out of the canyon. It has wisely restrained its armies of road builders from invading vast portions of the park. It has the left the North Rim alone. Superintendent Uberuaga assures that 92 percent of the park is zoned as backcountry. The developed stretch of the South Rim, in this sense, is a sacrifice zone that we should applaud.

With the specter of the Escalade and the Tusayan projects on the horizon, however, there is now an opportunity to be seized by the service. It is the opportunity, borne of crisis, to declare without apology that visitation has a ceiling, that the canyon, both for the enjoyment of its human visitors and the survival of its nonhuman inhabitants, has a carrying capacity, that economic growth has a limit. It is a chance at last for the park service to say what it has never said: *Enough.* ■

**Christopher Ketcham**, a contributing editor at *Harper's* magazine, has written for the *Journal* about the night sky, cougars, and the possible health risks of wi-fi technologies.