

## Canyon

All I wanted was one last long, cool drink. Just to satisfy that last urge seemed as if it would be enough before dying. I had been lost in the desert of the inner Grand Canyon for three days. It had been two and a half days since I'd had water or anything at all to drink. Two and a half days without water in heat over 100 degrees can do strange things to you. Like make you dizzy, delirious and even hallucinate.

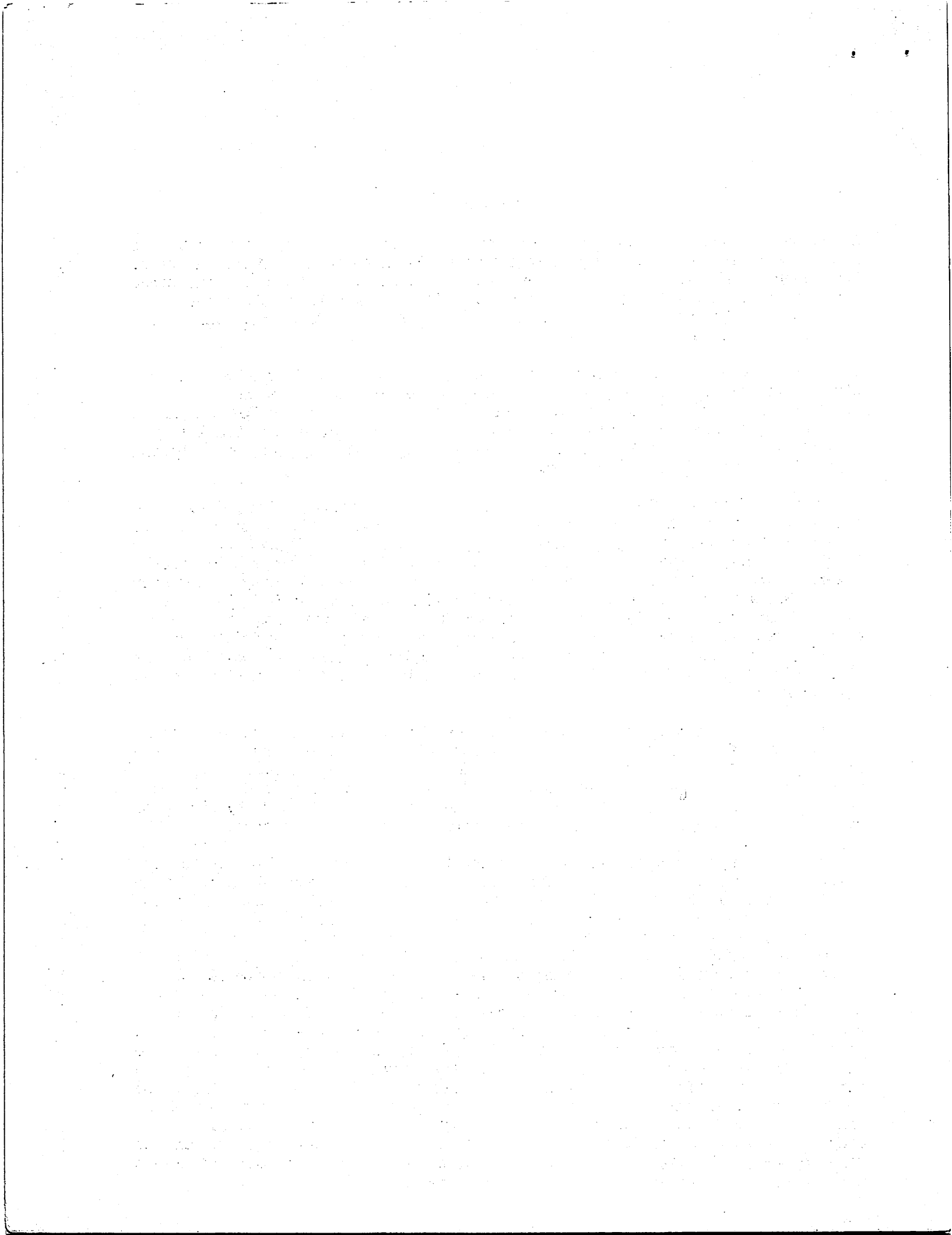
The trip started as a two-day solo excursion to Bass Rapids on the Colorado River. The trail which I planned to hike had gained some notoreity since its construction in the 1890s by W.W. Bass. Bass built the South Bass Trail to gain access to his copper and asbestos mines. In many places the trail is now washed out, but I had anticipated no trouble, judging from experience in hiking most of the other South Rim wilderness trails.

On Thursday June twelfth I parked my AMC Gremlin at isolated Bass Camp where the South Bass trailhead lies on the rim of Grand Canyon. The 20 mile route to Bass Camp from Grand Canyon Village through the Havasupai Indian Reservation is rough and rocky. The terrain alone is enough to keep all but the most avid hikers away. So I anticipated complete isolation for the following 48 hours or so. I found this to be true until after I had set up camp at Bass Rapids that night. But two friendly Floridian hikers found their way into my pleasant evening camp and stayed on the beach alongside the rapids. They told me of their 15 day excursion which would take them to idyllic Elves Chasm as well as Phantom Ranch and Indian Gardens. They were to be the last humans I would see for three days.

The following morning, after a quick jump into the icy-cold Colorado I began my ascent. The first part of the hike up consisted of scaling the wall of the inner gorge, the steep black schistose cliffs that loom ominously over the Colorado. This successfully completed, I followed the trail up and out of Bass Canyon, one of the Grand Canyon's many side canyons, all cut by forms of erosion. Bass Canyon is geologically notable as the Bass fault zone.

Upon emerging from Bass Canyon, I decided to take a rest. I had a good long drink of water and catnapped for about half an hour. I'd been making good time on the supposed nine hour hike and fully expected to finish long before the nine hours were up. This plan was not to be, however. After my rest I set out on what I presumed to be the South Bass trail. I now believe that route was a burro trail which crisscrossed the Bass trail. In this section of the canyon there are far more wild burros than people. For this reason, the burro trails are often more distinct than the human trails. The South Bass is no longer maintained..in places, the guide book relates, it is non-existent. The burros are not native to the area and are currently presenting a major problem to park rangers and others concerned with the wildlife of the canyon. The burros were introduced to the area by prospectors in the canyon around the turn of the century. At the time everything from asbestos to uranium was speculated to be profitable for mining in the canyon. The prospectors used burros to pack in mining equipment and afterward set them free. The burros thrived in the canyon, causing a decrease in the population of the native species, notably the bighorn sheep. During the 1900s the burros, now considered a menace, created a network of trails which confused the park system trails.

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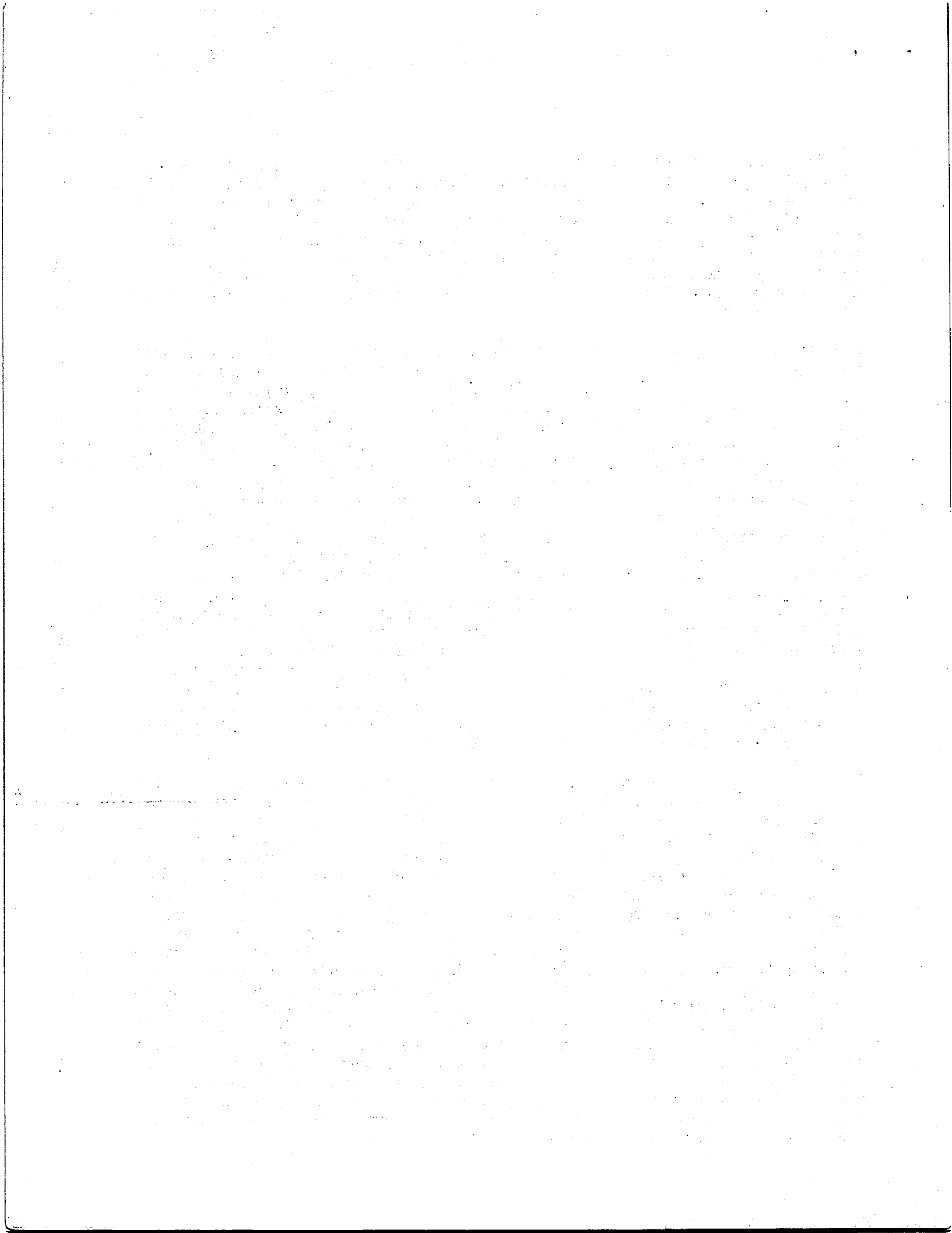


The trail began to peter out and it became increasingly obvious that I was on an aimless feeding trail. On Friday the 13th of June, 1980, I lost the South Bass trail for good. Having studied the geology of the canyon I knew by the red (Hermit) shale and rock formations that I was on the Esplanade, about 3 miles west of Bass trail. The Esplanade is a broad sandstone shelf located vertically between two expansive cliffs: the Coconino sandstone above and Redwall limestone below. The cliffs showed no break for a route to the rim, so after camping on a ridge on Friday night I set out west to try to find a route around the cliffs.

The decision to go west was not one which was easily arrived at. I knew that going west carried me further away from my scheduled route. By this time I had but a few drops of precious water left. I knew that trying to get back to the trail, and then out of the canyon on this much water would be nearly impossible. Also, I wanted to get back to the village by 5 p.m. Saturday so that the search party which is generally sent out when a hiker is 24 hours late, would not be necessary. I thought I could find a quick way to the rim by skirting the Coconino cliffs and looking for a break. I was wrong. I attempted to scale the cliffs without carrying my pack. I succeeded in doing two things in this attempt: first, I made it about three quarters of the way up before coming to an impassable junction and secondly I practically killed myself. The climbing was steep and often handholds would crumble away with little warning. I gave up and retreated to a sparsely shaded spot to rest.

While sitting under that juniper tree I spied a single drip of water on the side of a nearby gully. The water was clear and only slightly mineral-tasting. I drank some, but the flow of the dripping water was so slight that I could only fill my canteen with a couple gulps-worth of water before losing my patience. My plan now was to get back to the river by the South Bass trail if possible. It was still fairly early Saturday and I wanted to get started before the noon day heat began to take hold. I had given up hope of exiting the canyon before 5 o'clock that day.

Backtracking toward the South Bass I could only identify one landmark from the map. This was the white island of Coconino sandstone called Mt. ~~Heuwenthal~~ *Huethawal*. By late Saturday I had still been unsuccessful in finding the trail. My confusion increased as I started to become light-headed from lack of water in the desert heat. By this time my water was long gone. A network of burro trails and my own crisscrossing footsteps disoriented me enough to convince me to stay put and wait until the inevitable search party found me. I began conserving moisture in every imaginable way. An empty bottle, fairly airtight, I filled with all my apple cores and orange peels which managed to provide a few drops of wetness the next day. My two day food supply had dwindled to peanut butter, strawberry jam, bread and a bag of mixed nuts and raisins. All but the jam proved too dry to swallow because by late Saturday I had become too dehydrated to produce saliva to wash the food down. Prickly pear cactus became the staple of my diet for the next three days. The cactus pricklers managed to find their way into my hands, tongue, lips and the roof of my mouth. It seemed no amount of caution could prevent this painful process. After cutting the plant off at its stem I carved out the pricklers, skinned the cactus and ate the fruit inside. Most were only fairly juicy as rain had not fallen in the past month. Cactus tastes like one of those soft, dry practically unpalatable apples that supermarkets in the northeast try to sell in February.





By late Saturday my legs were shaking uncontrollably whenever I tried to sit still. Knowing that I had to cool off I sprayed myself with insect repellent. It felt cool going on. I laid my pack, blanket and jacket in a cross as a distress signal for aircraft and waited in the shade. I was not being spotted by the aircraft flying over. I know now that I should have had a signal mirror which would have better enabled scenic air flights to spot me. Unfortunately my equipment did not include matches (park regulations prohibit campfires) so I was unable to start a fire.

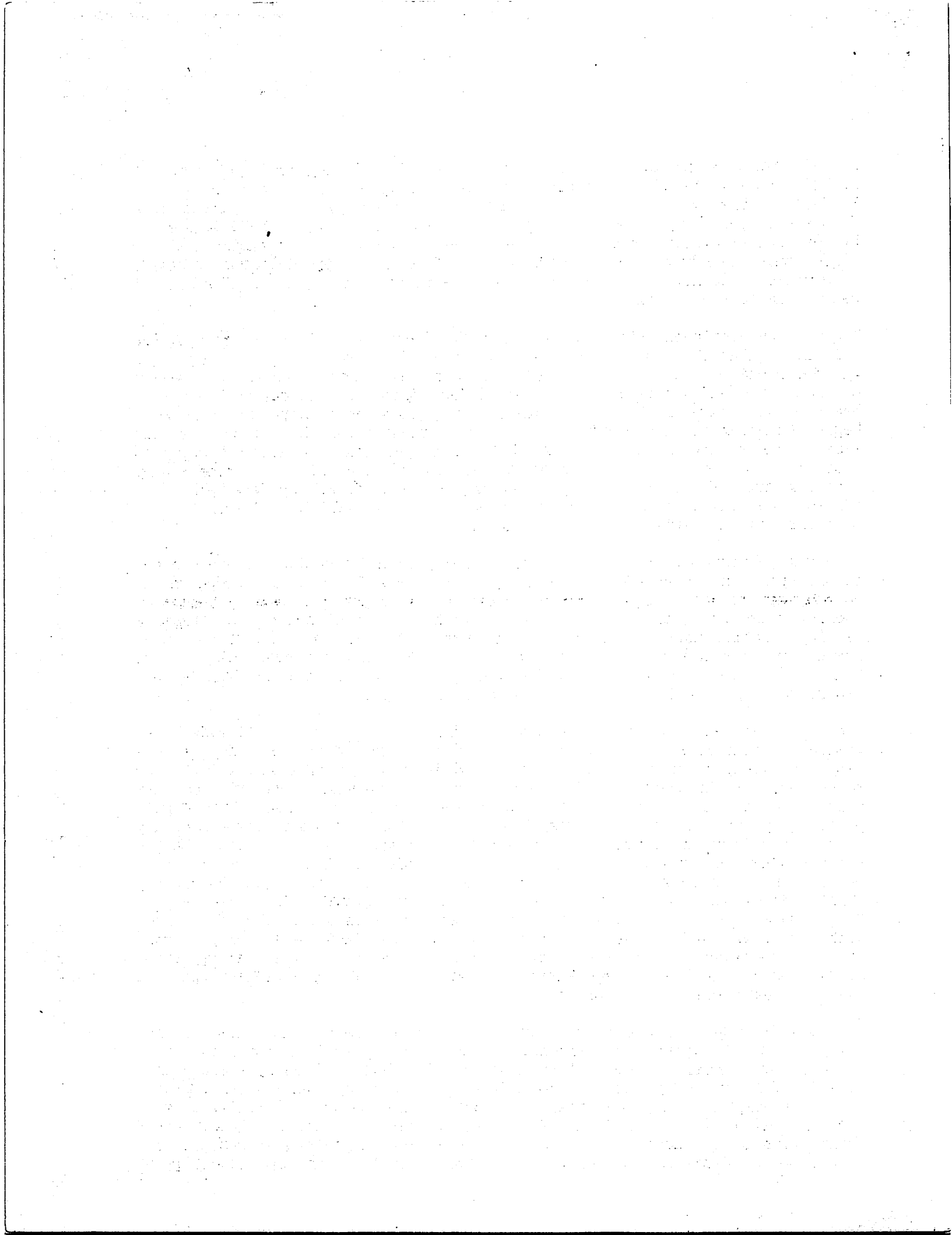
The waiting continued until 4 o'clock Sunday afternoon. I had been yelling for help at regular 15 minute intervals. By 4 p.m. there was no sign of help and I was delirious and probably slightly irrational from lack of water. It seemed as though the end was near. The spring I had discovered the day before was at least 3 miles west over rough terrain. But this water was my only hope so I began preparing for another trek across the Esplanade for that water. By this time my motion was slow and robot-like. I hopped from one spot of shade to another, to avoid the enveloping heat. The heat felt as if it was a substance pressing down all over my body. All day I'd had fitful snatches of sleep filled with delirious dreams of old friends bringing supplies of soda, water, beer and other liquids for which I yearned.

Slowly I gathered up some things from my pack which I thought I'd need to get to the spring and wrapped them up in my rain poncho. I was clear-headed enough to remember to bring aspirin for the fever. I had not taken any yet because there was no way I could swallow them. With a piece of shale I scratched a seemingly futile note on the rock on which my pack lay. It read: "Sun. - Gone for water. I'm desperate. Please wait. J.G. " Later a ranger told me that this note helped save my life as the search party could be reasonably sure I was alive when they found the note early the next day.

Finally I was ready to begin the most bizarre walk of my life. Already I was completely delirious. I felt as though I'd been removed from my body and was watching myself stumble along. My motor coordination was pitiful and each step seemed like a misadventure. I began to sense an unusual state of mind take hold. It was as if my "self" had become two beings, one with a male personality and one female. The two ways of thinking conflicted on every issue, no matter how trivial. Every decision to act on anything was a battle between these two ways of thinking. For example, as I scrambled across a particularly dangerous ledge with reckless abandon, I heard the anima say "What's the matter with you? Do you have a death wish?" The other replied "No, a water wish .. I'm trying to keep us alive." This state of mind combined with the sense that I was removed from my physical body made this the most bizarre experience I have ever had. Though bizarre, it was very enlightening as to how my mind works in a crisis. At one point, I scuffled across a sleeping rattlesnake in a round coil.

The terrain began to get very rough and I found myself boulder-hopping and doing a lot of jumping and climbing. My capacity for caution had dwindled to nil with my increasing sense of desperation. I quickly pulled up short when I came to the edge of a terrace which had crumbled away, leaving me with the choice of jumping to the next terrace, about ten feet below, or backtracking to find another route. I decided to jump and successfully landed in a pile of shale talus on the level terrace below. As I picked myself up I was overcome by a powerful dizziness and as I stumbled backward I slipped over the edge of

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the rock ledge onto which I had just jumped. I had no idea how far I would fall, as I had not even had time to glance over the edge. When I crashed into a boulder only about five feet below I was never so grateful to be battered into hard rock. For the first time I began to feel certain that I would soon meet my death. I began to pray fervently and prepare myself mentally to die. At twenty years of age it seems hard to believe that I was ready to die, but I felt so close to God that I was completely unafraid. Still, I had no intention of dying if I had a choice. But for a short time I thought I had no choice. The place I had fallen to seemed as good a place as any in which to pass on. A very bright light appeared all around. Suddenly I felt a new strength course through my body. It was as though God had granted me another chance to live. I started to think rationally for the first time in hours.

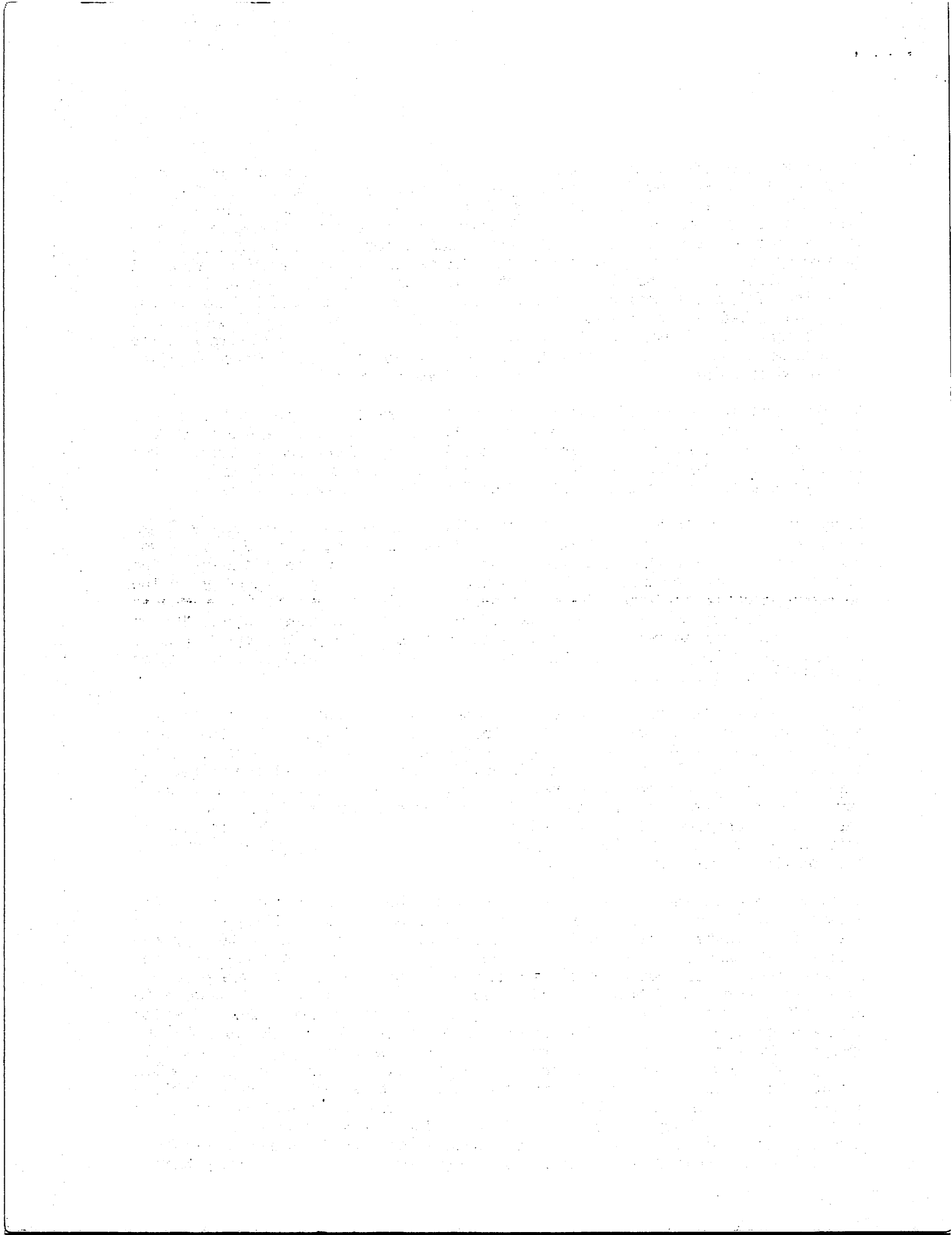
Knowing that my fever had risen dramatically I tried to figure out a way to swallow the aspirin. I took 3 aspirin, chewed them up and washed them down with the strawberry jam. I poured alcohol on my limbs and forehead. Not looking forward to the trek ahead of me, I rested for a few more minutes and judged the amount of daylight left. Soon I was ready to renew the venture.

Long shadows danced over the rocky terrain. Blurred images of cactus brush moved silently across my field of vision. I was in my fourth day in the canyon and squinting from the brightness had made my vision very blurry. The blurriness created an illusory, surrealistic version of my surroundings. The canyon seemed far different from its usual majestic beauty. Now it seemed as though it had opened onto the gates of hell. The harshness of the barren terrain was never so real. I began to see man as no longer a part of nature. My mind was telling me that I didn't belong here but my senses were telling me that there was no way out.

The hike seemed to drag on forever. I was walking around a series of ridges jutting out from the base of the Coconino cliffs. As I approached the tip of each one I told myself I would recognize the talus below as the area where the spring would be. The end was not in sight though. I vented frustration by smashing a nearby bighorn sheep skull, which if I had been able to save would have been an excellent showpiece. I was carrying few supplies but tiring easily so I dropped all but a jacket, canteen and small pot to collect the dripping water. I left the other supplies on a ledge, expecting to recover them on the way back to my pack the next day.

Finally I came to what looked like the part of the Esplanade where the spring awaited me. I had been worried for some time about the possibility of finding the spring. Several drops of lime-filled water I had noticed in the general area on Saturday were nowhere to be found. This could have meant that the intense heat of Saturday and Sunday had dried up the flow of these drips. Thus, the spring could have done likewise. The dreaded possibility seemed to be confirmed when I found what I thought was the spring. The gathering darkness and my contributing delirium caused me to mistake a rock ledge for the spring. Cobwebs hung from the bone-dry ledge. The disappointment caused my entire body to collapse on the shale. Night fell and the utter gloom which swallowed me wiped all hope from my thoughts. Death seemed imminent. Unlike before it seemed now as if I had no choice. Death was not welcome and I was afraid. My most bizarre thought was that an afterlife would probably not be a physical world and if it was not, how could I ever possibly have a drink of water. Without that drink it seemed I could never be happy. Looking back I

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recognize just how addicted we are to our physical desires. Now I have come to see this and as a result I give thanks.

The night was spent fading in and out of delirious dreams. A vivid hallucination nearly caused me to lose my life. In the vision a pitifully skinny fellow approached me and commented "Son, you're in a bad way, why if we were to arm-wrestle in a couple of days even I would beat you." Then, before vanishing he told me "Don't worry, lad, tomorrow morning Richard will come to check his crops, which he grows in this old canyon and he'll find you and fly you out by helicopter. Just stay right here." By the next morning, just before sunrise I was still convinced "Richard" would come to rescue me if I only stayed put. If I had I would never have found the spring which was nearby and in this remote spot I would never have been spotted from the air.

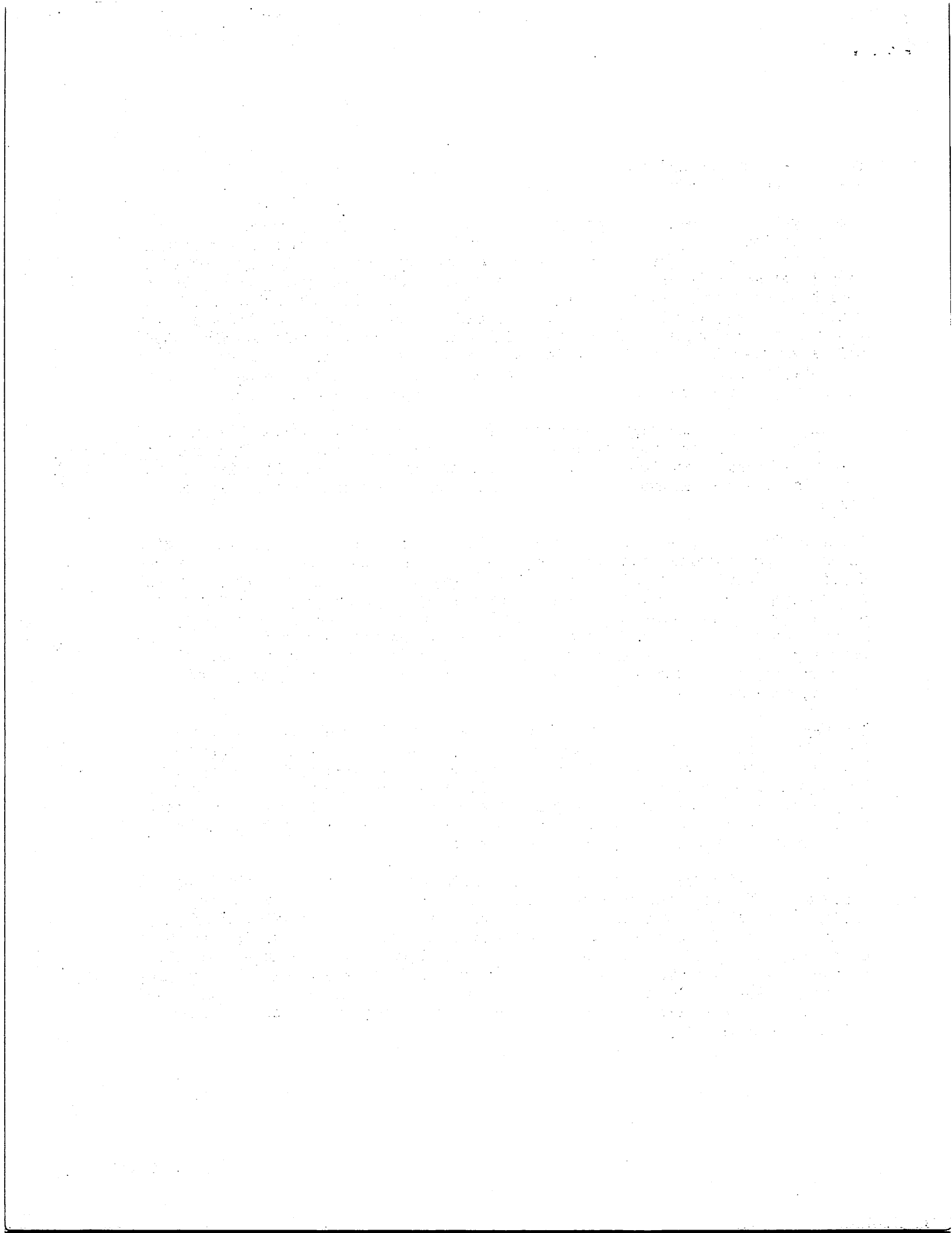
The sunrise that morning was among the most beautiful events I have ever witnessed. Pink feathers of clouds curled over the horizon. It seemed as though God had miraculously stepped back in my life. The illusion of the hallucination was cleared from my mind and with new strength I searched for the spring.

I found the spring around one more of the jutting ridges. I paused to give thanks before gulping down the first pan of water I collected. The water was deliciously cool and fresh. Much of that day was spent in the shade of the overhanging rock, collecting water, alternately drinking a pan of water and saving a pan in my canteen. By mid-day I had filled my canteen with the spring water. Diarrhea had set in but not to the extent that I was forced to stop drinking the water. By this time my body was in a bad way anyway. I was severely dehydrated and was covered with the prickly brush which I had been walking through.

The way to my pack was easier as I was able to find a route below the base of the cliff which I had hiked along the night below. Then, while walking in the blistering heat I heard a most welcome sound. I had been spotted by a scenic helicopter carrying tourists. The tour pilots had been told to watch for me if they were in that part of the canyon. The pilot gave the rangers directions to my location and I was flown out by Ranger Glen Fuller. I was treated by the paramedics and questioned by the Park service.

The conflict with which I had to deal with was in many ways one which we all must face: the conflict between mentally preparing to die but at the same time trying to survive. In a similar way we all must deal with a world which most of us view as only a step toward the next one. Those five days in June have changed my life. I'm no better, though I wish I was. I don't appreciate life anymore, though I wish I could. But I am now so intensely aware of everything around me that I feel as though I am going to burst with life and death and love and hate and fear and courage and all the other unresolved conflicts we all encounter everyday.

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Bass Trail Itinerary and Equipment

5th trip, 2 days and one night

To: Bass Rapids

By: South Bass Trail

Thursday Morning: Eat Breakfast here

take pills

Go to P.O.

Drive to Bass camp, bring road map

Wear: Tape feet  
Tube sox and blue sox  
hiking boots  
cutoffs and red shorts (jackknife, \$, chapstick)  
T-shirt

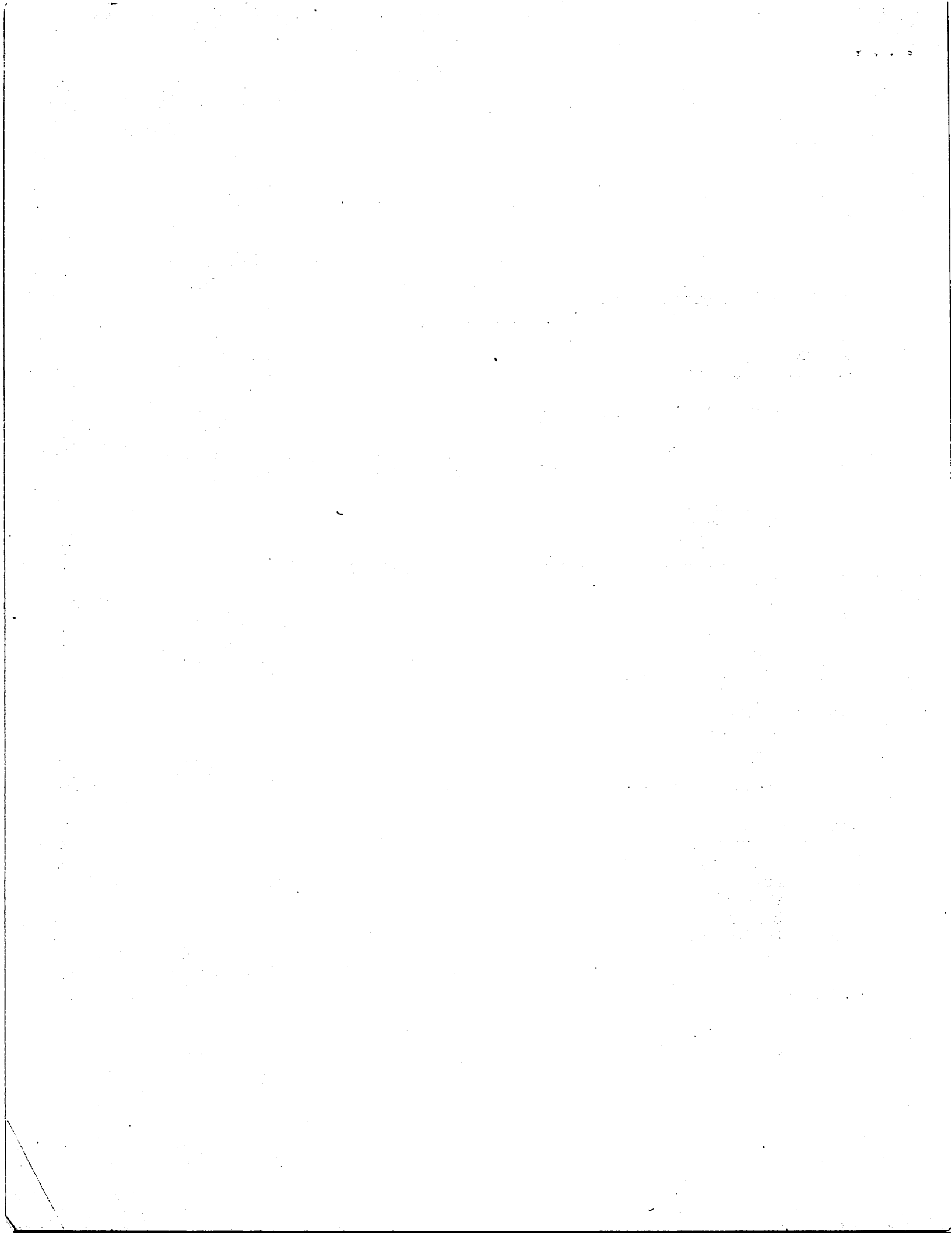
Bring: serape  
rain jacket  
camera  
stove and utensils

Change of clothes:  
underwear  
sox  
T-shirt  
hooded red sweatshirt

First Aid:  
solarcaine  
bug spray  
box  
tape  
band aids  
toilet paper  
aspirin

Toiletries:  
soap  
toothpaste  
scrub  
floss

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Fishing stuff  
2 canteens  
flashlight  
map  
sneakers

Food: Thursday lunch - at Bass camp  
3 chicken pieces  
apple  
orange  
orange juice

Thursday supper  
spam  
soup  
granola  
apple  
orange  
water  
1/2 carafe wine

Friday breakfast  
apple  
orange  
granola  
cheese

Friday lunch  
Peanut butter & jelly sandwich  
2 oranges  
gatorade

For Trail  
Trail mix  
2 apples  
orange



1890

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CANYON

Song of Despair in the Desert

The feeling of being so alone,

Makes my mind roam,

This must be my own,

Home, Sweet Home.

Colors resplendent,

In morning's hue,

They give energy, to be spent,

On hope of rescue.

Long shadows,

Of late afternoon.

Ease the woes,

And soon ... the moon.

Daily cycle rebegun,

No help in sight,

This man is done,

If not found by night.

Lost in the desert,  
My mind reels deliriously,  
For lack of water.

Dawn of the 3rd day lost,  
5th day in the canyon,  
Beauty of the sunrise revitalizes me.

The bleak brightness of day,  
Gives way to shadows,  
The desert sun is on the horizon.

