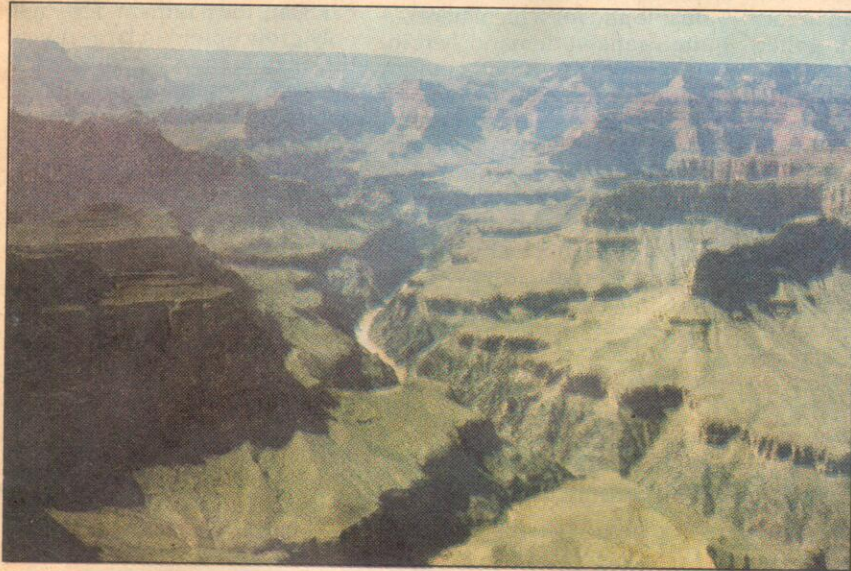


Where man responds



The Colorado passing through the bed of the Grand Canyon

By Suchita Malik

THE great Grand Canyon — the majestic, spectacular, magnificent, incredible abyss that lies in a slumber, deep in the heart of the earth for centuries — is not more than five hours drive from Las Vegas, the famous Las Vegas, the notorious Las Vegas, known for its dazzling casinos, night clubs, night life and the dancing girls dilly-dallying like carrots before the ogling viewers. On the one end you have the man-created world of artificial lights giving the impression of one walking practically into a sparkling, scintillating sea of twinkling lights with its tall buildings, Monte Carlo and the Caesar's Palace hotels, the seemingly real erupting volcanoes which boast of man's highly innovative architectural calibre as well as its scientific advancement.

Not far from there is the mammoth and imposing Grand Canyon, the world-famous gorge in the USA, and the Supreme creation of the

of this world doesn't boast of His creations. His creations rather speak for themselves, with their natural grandeur, their awesome posture and their mammoth vastness.

A visit to the Grand Canyon was a dream come true for my husband who cherished a visit to this wonder ever since he took his first lessons in geography in the college. For me it was a post-visit realisation as to what I would have missed

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had I not come along. The discovery of Grand Canyon itself was rather a dramatic co-incidence. Years ago, they say, a wandering cowboy peered down into the Canyon's fearsome depths and exclaimed: "Something sure happened here!" Like many visitors, he could not fathom that the Canyon was shaped mainly by the ribbon of the river at its base. Only a closer inspection reveals that here the Colorado can be a raging torrent, bearing with it tens of thousands of tonnes of sediment a day — 'too thick to drink, too thin to plough, the old settlers would complain. The deep, central slash is the work of the Colorado. This tremendous trench carved by

an hour before reaching the actual place. The film starts with the picture of a little blue biplane bumping over the floor of a featureless desert when suddenly the biplane reaches the rim of the Grand Canyon and goes down over the edge. And one goes along with it, twisting and tumbling into that shocking unknown. The film, however, is a preview which, somewhat, prepares you mentally for the awesome impact that the Grand Canyon phenomenon makes on you later when one is actually confronted by the existence of something so vast, so old, so serene, so violent and yet so silent.

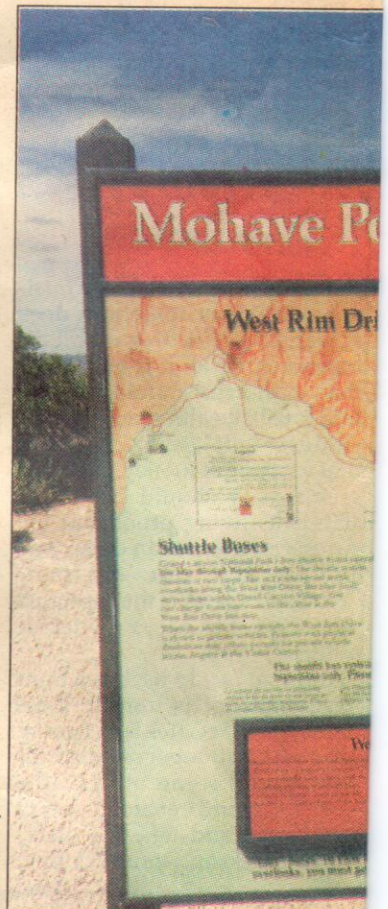
Discovery and exploration of the complexities of this grand phenomenon by man has been a saga of adventure, valour, courage, dare-devilry and an insatiable desire in man to delve into the mysteries of the unknown, irrespective and unmindful of the greatest dangers that it poses. The name of Major John Wesley Powell, a one-armed American civil war veteran, will always be associated with the Grand Canyon. He led the first expedition down the Colorado river in May 1869 — a small party of nine men in four boats. One boat, carrying most of the provisions, was sunk in the first week but the explorers persisted with their venture and entered the

miles (15 km) wide, on average, and stretches for some 280 miles (450 km).

The fierceness of the seemingly innocuous Colorado river from atop the West Rim Drive can only be understood and appreciated if the site to the visit is preceded by a highly informative 45-minute film on the Grand Canyon that is shown in the IMAX theatre, the ultra modern cinema with the five-storey, wrap-around screen, located about half

of the expedition coupled with a constant struggle with the forces of nature led three of the men to opt and climb out of the Canyon, only to be killed by the Indians. Ironically, the next day the boats emerged into the calm waters of the lower Colorado. Man had conquered the river — but at a price.

We reached the place by about 1 p.m., found the park-



Photos by the writer

A description board which o

ing lot and reached the shuttle route as the West Rim Drive is closed to personal vehicles now. Starting from the West Rim Interchange to the Hermits Rest, it's a 8-mile long route. The shuttle stops at all the important points where people get down, take a view of the Canyon from that point and get on the next shuttle only to get down at the next point. It goes on like this and the visitor comes across Trailview, Overlook, Powell

s to God's challenge

Hermits Rest at the tail end of this drive. You take a return journey to the place of your parking after completing this tour. Hermits Rest has shopping facilities from where a visitor could pick up some souvenirs. On the return point, you can see a wonderful painting giving you the clear overview of the Canyon simultaneously with the real view only



...viates the need for a guide

explaining its various features. The painting titled 'Grand Canyon Vista' has notes written thereon which read something like this:

"Many Canyon features bear the names of gods and heroes around the world. These names are primarily the work of two men. In 1882, geologist Clarence Dutton wrote the first important book on the Grand Canyon geology. With an interest in oriental reli-

India and China. Dutton began naming Canyon features after Eastern gods. Later, mapmaker Francois Matthes, while producing the Grand Canyon's topographic map, followed Dutton's practice of "heroic nomenclature".

A reading of the description on the painting makes you take a real view and identification of the various peaks named after various gods, prominent among them being: Isis Temple, Buddha Temple, Bright Angel Canyon, Zoraster Temple, Indian Garden and the Brahma Temple.

The glory of the Grand Canyon is heightened by the special colour effects at sunrise and during the sunset time. At sunset, the red and brown layers of rock look absolutely fascinating. The Canyon's history can be read in the differing ages of rocks as they emerge layer upon layer from the depths. The layers vary in shade and colour and the tones seem to change during the day. Lowest of all is the Inner Gorge and the Colorado river runs through the Canyon, which extends 446 km in north-west Arizona.

According to the historians, two billion years ago, the dark rock here was part of a mountain range as high as the Himalayas. The mountains were worn down to a plain and replaced by a shallow sea. Limestone, deposited on the sea floor, contains the fossils of plankton that are 1 billion years old. But overlying these rocks are layers of rock formed in the Palaeozoic era, between about 550 and 250 million years ago. These rocks contain fossils of animals and plants that lived in that era.

The facts available on the Grand Canyon point out that upwards from the Inner Gorge,

were worn away to be drowned by muddy flood plains where amphibians and reptiles left their footprints.

There are layers that were once marshes and desert and further ancient seas in which corals lived. The Colorado has worn through these rocks in the last six million years, creating spectacular Canyon walls on which the Palaeozoic rocks are exposed to view. The Canyon has been widened by rivers flowing from side Canyons and by several natural forces, including wind, rain and melting snow. Yet when lava spread down one end of the gorge less than a million years ago, the Canyon was already within 50 ft (15m) of its present depth.

Grand Canyon National Park is visited by about three million people annually. Some like to drive along the park roads and stop at scenic viewing points to have a closer look at the Canyon. The headquarters of the park are at Grand Canyon village, on the south rim of the Canyon. The more remote north rim begins about 15 km away on the other side of the Canyon. Besides driving and walking, some people ride mules into

the Canyon and others can also enter by boat or raft on the Colorado river. The park also offers horseback riding and fishing, but hunting is prohibited. Helicopter rides are understood to have been banned now. Reservations or permits are required for all overnight hikes, mule trips, and river tours.

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enormity of the great phenomenon. One cannot help but marvel at the beauty of the nature at its best and its secrets revealed. The imposing Gorge, appearing sometimes like Egyptian pyramids stands headlong as a tough testimony of the

inimical 'super-creator', posing a challenge to the inextinguishable spirit of man to unravel the mysteries of nature. And man has responded to the call of nature by naming some of its peaks as Buddha Temple, Brahma Temple etc. This process of taming between the creator and his creation seems wonderful, indeed! Needless to say the Grand Canyon deserves to be on the top of any visitor's list.

