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Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park

Colorado National Parks

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Black Canyon Aswirl

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not look forward to them, because I am not a strong swimmer; nor did I like the idea of being cold and wet. Much to my delight the crossings were very pleasant, and the cool water had a soothing effect on my hot, tired feet.

All along the river large rocks had been carved by the water into beautiful pieces of sculpture. Dipping up and down, we frequently had to climb as much as fifty feet up the canyon walls to avoid large piles of boulders and driftage. In some places it was easier to travel higher on the wall than to negotiate these chaotic piles, even though we had to push our way through heavy brush.

Rain persisted as the afternoon wore on, becoming ever heavier until we were forced to take shelter in a driftwood lean-to, which we luckily discovered at the height of the downpour. Our lug-soled boots were no better than skates, and no amount of finesse would make them hold to the slippery rocks. A fall would have meant more than bruises.

We were fascinated by numerous rock spires that began at the water's edge and disappeared into the fog 200 feet above the river. It seemed as if the ceiling of fog were being supported by these tremendous needles, some of which were as much as fifty feet in diameter.

Soon the rain stopped and we continued slowly. To our surprise the canyon began to widen, and we were again walking on a fisherman's trail with tin cans peering out at us from under the brush and small

clumps of grass. Obviously, a route down to the river from Gunnison Point existed.

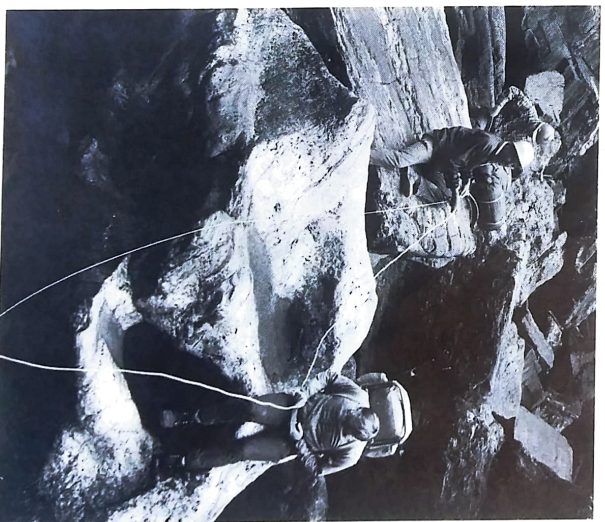
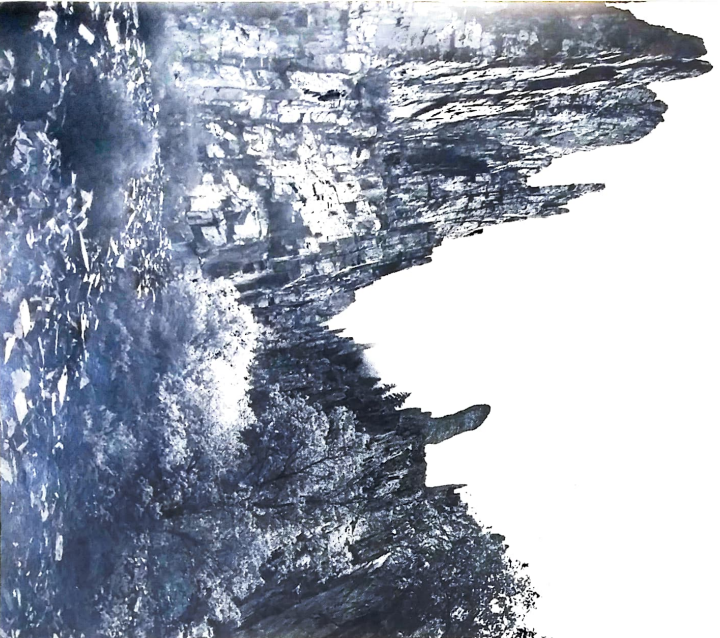
We scrambled over boulders, through some underbrush, and half-fell, half-slid down a large rock and onto a sandy bench thirty feet wide and sixty feet long. It had an overhanging roof of solid rock to shelter us from the mist that still persisted. We lost no time preparing camp and had a good fire going by 6:30 p.m.

Next morning, the slit of light above us was blue. We could see the south rim and clearly make out the hand railing and fence at Palpit Rock View.

We were on our way by 9:00 a.m. and had not gone far when the canyon walls began closing in on us. The riverbed at this point was completely blocked by boulders from rock slides, some as large as railroad cars. The water was flowing around, under, and through them. All the rocks were covered with lichens, and we did not feel at ease while standing on them. One slip would mean a fall into the churning water and probable death, as one would be sucked under the rocks. We topped up and crossed the river to the south side and lined over our packs on a temporary tramway.

We negotiated ledge after ledge, crouching as we passed overhanging rocks so they would not snag our packs and throw us into deep pools of azure water. It took us most of the morning to cover one mile. By noon we were confronted by vertical rocks on both sides of the river, known as The Narrows. We pro-

Needles below Gunnison Point—those on the left about 400 feet high—seem to support a ceiling of fog.



With the riverbed clogged with enormous boulders, Dick prepares to belay Terry across the slick rocks.