

# PATH OF BEAUTY

*Photographic Adventures in the Grand Canyon*

CHRISTOPHER BROWN

Dear Reader,

My life has been a love affair with the Earth. I love this place. It is our Garden of Eden—and it is the only one we have. I consider myself a professional sightseer, a daydreamer, and an explorer. I have climbed distant mountains, explored secret canyons, and rafted wild rivers—places few people have ever visited. I first saw the Grand Canyon when I was fifteen, when I hiked from the North Rim to the South Rim one weekend. What drew me back as an adult was the lure of the Colorado River, and the challenge and excitement of big white-water. I was a young river guide, and the Colorado is the big daddy of the Colorado Plateau. On each trip I went back to places I knew, and tried to find new places I didn't.

Slowly my interest shifted from the adrenaline of the rapids to the aesthetics of the Canyon, and the tranquility of remote grottoes. I evolved as a photographer, and became entranced by the visual experience, the beauty of being in the Canyon. As a river guide I took responsibility for “Scenic Alerts!” to make sure no good view went unappreciated. Having photographed in the Canyon for forty years, I created this book as a report on what I have seen—a record of one man's sightseeing delights. My view of the Canyon, from the inside out, is distinctly not the Grand Canyon most people expect to see. I never know what to expect when I go to the Canyon, just that it will be different—and this is what keeps me coming back for more!

Complementing the sixty-eight full-color photographs in the book are a series of essays that begin by exploring the geological processes that made the Canyon the natural wonder that it is today, as well as the adventure and excitement that accompany life on the river as a boatman. Mirroring the extremes of life, the text shifts from adventure to beauty, discussing the physical and emotional components of visual perception. Over many years my quest has been to achieve what I call “First Sight”: seeing objects as if for the first time in order to convey the essence of things in my photographs. From my youthful attraction to adventure and physical challenges to my fascination with aesthetics and the pursuit of seeing beyond the superficial, I remain an explorer of both exterior and interior landscapes. My quest is to reveal layers of meaning and beauty in life that are often obscured by our preconceptions and habitual ways of perceiving the world, our relationships, and ourselves. My photography is about paying attention.

Though the Grand Canyon is made of rocks, it was carved by water, and as Lao Tzu was fond of saying, the weak always overcomes the strong. This paradox is operative in river running and photography, both of which teach us to surrender to forces outside of ourselves. While at first glance this book is a story of rocks and water, it is also about the lessons we can learn from water—and the immense power that comes from its yielding softness. The depth of my photography is the result of an intuitive process based on these lessons.

Through stunning photography and an engaging text, *Path of Beauty* brings together my perspective on adventure, beauty, and reflection in the wilderness. It is an evocative visual reminder of the importance of wild landscapes, where people can go to explore, discover, and grow wise. It will resonate with anyone who has ever wanted to leave the clamor of the modern world behind and immerse himself in the fresh, restorative splendor of the wilderness.

All the best from the Canyon,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christopher Brown

# TABLE OF CONTENTS: ESSAYS BY CHRISTOPHER BROWN

*Path of Beauty* is divided into five sequences of gorgeous photographs complemented by Brown's essays on the Grand Canyon and the philosophy that drives his photographic process. The essays listed below begin with an introduction to the Canyon, the unique geologic forces that shaped it into one of the seven natural wonders of the world, and a description of his life on the Colorado River. They shift into a discussion of Brown's quest to achieve what he terms "First Sight" and how his experience in the Canyon has shaped his perspective as a photographer.

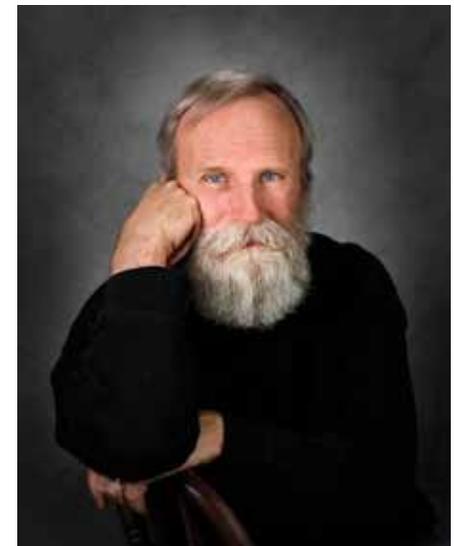
I: ENCOUNTERING THE CANYON

II: ADVENTURE: LIFE ON THE RIVER

III: BEAUTY AND FIRST SIGHT

IV: PHOTOGRAPHY: THE ART OF SEEING

V: REFLECTION: WILDERNESS, CONNECTION, RHYTHM



Courtesy of James Atherton

Christopher Brown is a master printer who teaches photography and printmaking in Boulder, Colorado. His prints, as well as their attention to detail, color, and composition, have earned him the respect of many in the photography community. His work is displayed in many private and public collections across the country.



#### SCHIST CAMP, MORNING

Looking up at the South Rim a vertical mile above the Inner Gorge. As soon as the sun reaches the Colorado River the temperature will jump from 60 to 90 degrees, and the view will be obscured by intense light. This is one of the nicest times of day in the Canyon, and like many things, is fleeting.



SOFT ROCKS, HARD WATER

As the soft yield of water cleaves the obstinate stone,  
So to yield with life solves the insoluble:  
To yield, I have learned, is to come back again.  
But this unworded lesson,  
This easy example,  
Is lost upon men.

—Lao Tzu, Witter Byner, trans.  
(thanks to the Witter Byner Foundation for permission to reprint)





MYSTERIUM MAGNUM



NATIONAL CANYON GROTTO

In places, National Canyon is filled with piles of boulders and sharp, smashed rocks fallen from the cliffs above in a chaotic, hot, dry jumble of debris that you can hardly walk through. And then there is this.



SCHIST WAVE

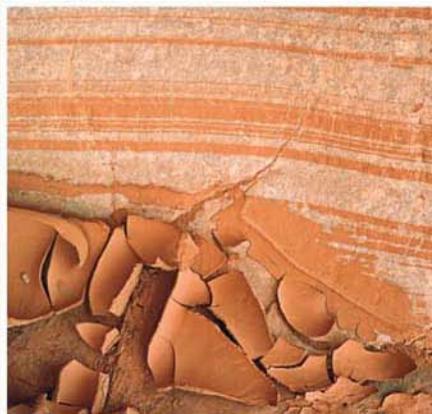
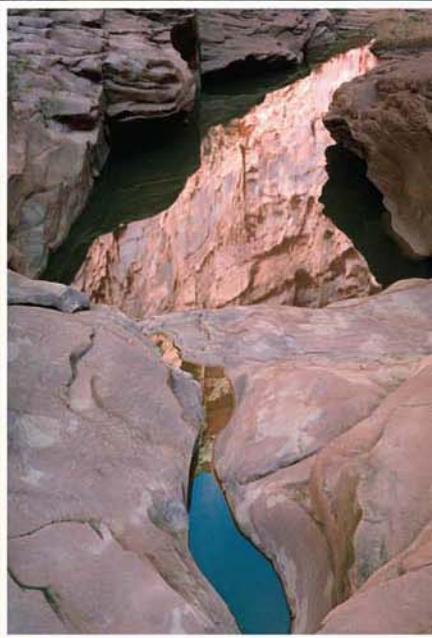
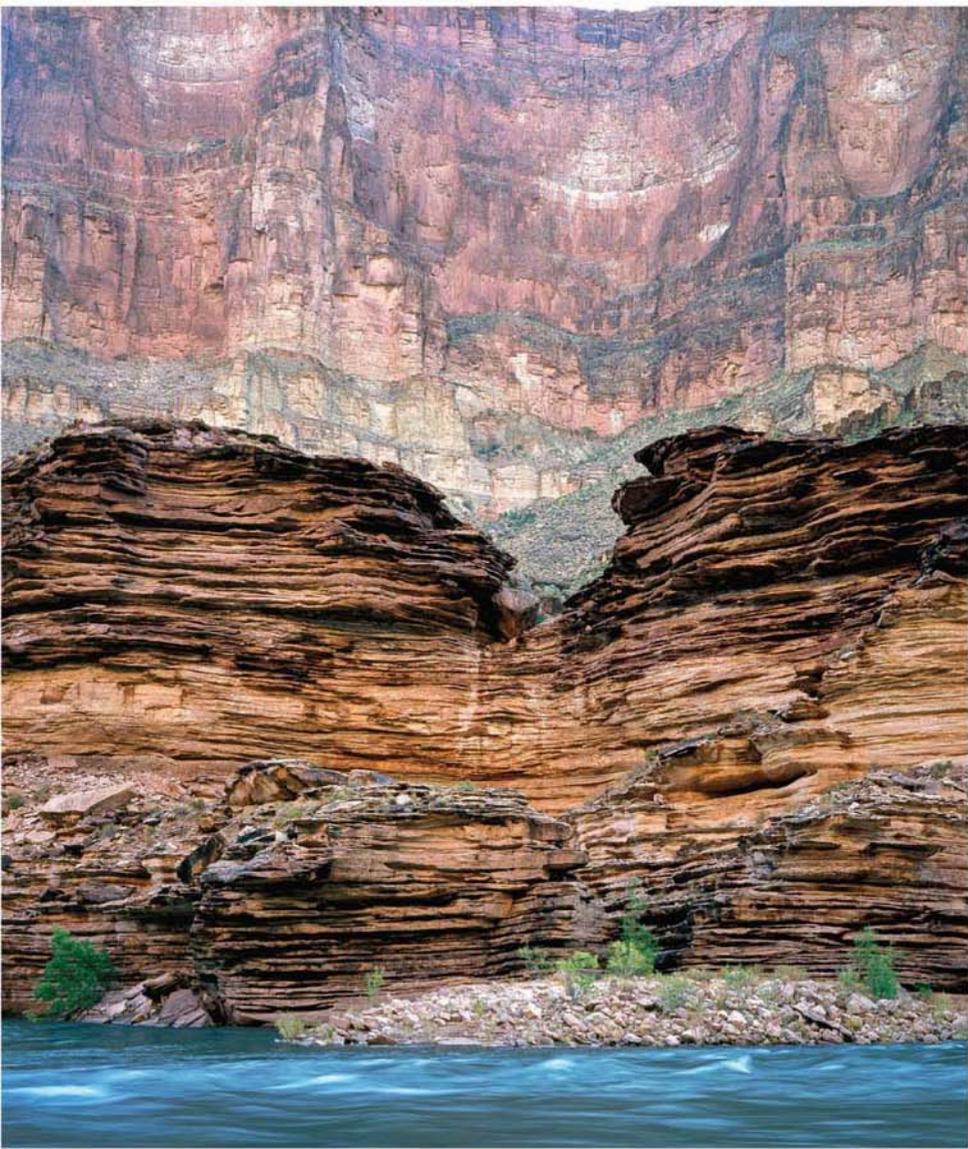
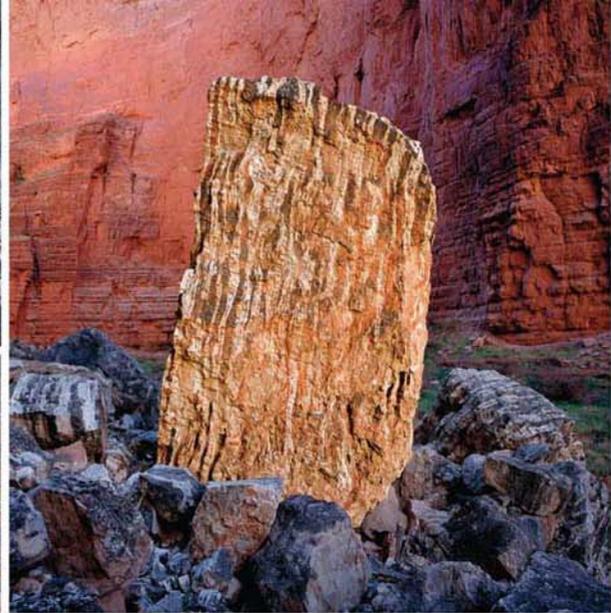
To become schist, a rock had to cook under high temperature and pressure deep in the earth, and become plastic.

As it cooled it retained its fluid appearance, like water flowing over a rock in the river, for the next couple of billion years. When it reappears it seems to say: "What do I look like now?"



NANKOWEAP

I had never seen the river in this light in over thirty trips, so I couldn't resist taking this photograph, even though this is one of the most photographed views in Marble Canyon, looking downstream about four miles.

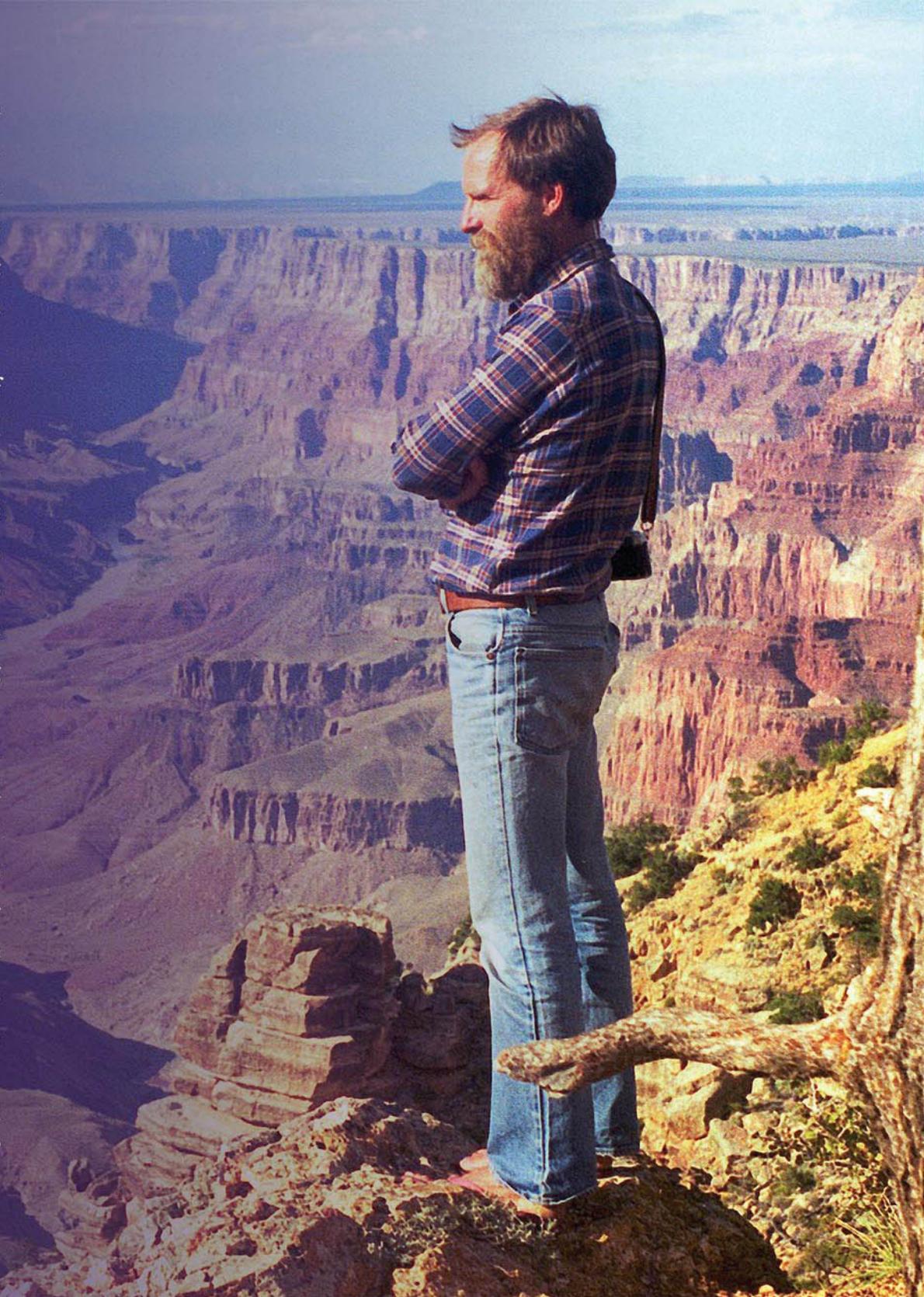


**C**HRISTOPHER BROWN has been an explorer for longer than he can remember. His high school graduation present was an Outward Bound course in Colorado that inspired him to move there and spend the next forty years guiding mountaineering and river trips from Alaska to Ecuador. He was a boatman in the Grand Canyon for about twenty of those years, and has rowed thirty-five two-week trips through the Canyon on the Colorado River.

Brown carried cameras on all of these adventures and taught himself photography. He began working in black and white, but eventually realized that the Southwest was really about color, so he set out to make color photographs with the same intensity and expressiveness that only black and white had at that time. He moved from 35mm to medium and then to large format, built a darkroom to make Cibachrome prints, and eventually took the leap into making digital prints from film originals. He considers prints to be the ultimate form of photographic expression, and his process of transforming an original exposure into a fine print sometimes takes years.

Today, Brown lives in Boulder, Colorado, where he makes prints and exhibits photographs in his studio/gallery, as well as giving lectures and workshops on photography and printmaking. His prints have been showcased in over one hundred exhibitions, have been published widely, and are in many private, public, and corporate collections, including The Denver Art Museum and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. He was the first photographer in Colorado to receive a commission in the Art in Public Places program of the Colorado Council on the Arts and Humanities, and he was a winner in the Sierra Club's first photography contest.

Brown goes to the Grand Canyon whenever he gets a chance. "I still haven't seen it all, I never see the same thing twice, and it looks better each time!"



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