



Canyon de Chelly, located in the middle of the Navajo Reservation, rivals the Grand Canyon with the view from its rim.

SOUTHWEST

It was a dewy morning along the Brazos, purple dawn spreading out over the damp, pungent sage like a velvet skirt floating off the knees of a Denver dance-hall girl, when I sat up in my bedroll, eyeball-to-barrel with a cocked .45. It was that shiftless snake, Deke Buttle, sneaking back for another shot at the stolen payroll. Uh, sorry, my mistake, it was a cast-iron skillet and my turn to cook breakfast. By the third or fourth day of a desert camping trip, the mind does strange things.

Later that afternoon I climbed through the crumbling adobe of an Anasazi ruin. I inhaled deeply, clearing my thoughts and preparing to join the elders in the living circle of the kiva. We would smoke the pipe and call upon Feather Boy to come down from the high mesa where he lived with Spider Woman, perhaps he would tell us if these strange white creatures we had seen were human.

I can't help it. The Southwest just does something weird to me.



A NAVAJO VIEW

Although the Grand Canyon is *the* view of the West, about 100 miles to the east—near the four-way junction of Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico—another scenic canyon gives you a breathtaking view from its high rim. It also offers closeup encounters

with ancient and modern Native Americans.

Canyon de Chelly (pronounced "duh-shay") National Monument, in Arizona, lies on 83,940 acres in the middle of the Navajo Reservation. Between the canyon's 1,000-foot-high walls rises Spider Rock, a 1,000-foot spire sacred to several ancient tribes, and on the canyon's floor, Navajo guides lead visitors through dozens of ruined Pueblo cliff dwellings. One trail to the canyon floor is self-guided. All other trips require guides, who either charge nothing (for planned Park Service hikes) or as much as \$43 (for a daylong, Navajo-guided Land Rover tour). At nearby Thunderbird Lodge (602-674-5841), a trading post built in the 1890s, you can stay in a modern, air-conditioned room for around \$40. Or you can stay in the well-shaded monument campground at no cost. Call 602-674-5436.



TO HELL AND BACK—YOU HOPE

Where do the summer temperatures *average* more than 110 degrees Fahrenheit? Where else but California's Death Valley? I know a photographer who, with writer Tim Cahill, tried to backpack from the lowest point in the Valley (and the U.S.)—282 feet below sea level—to the 14,495-foot crest of Mount Whitney, 104 miles to the west. In August, they didn't make it. Some of the searchers had given the two up

Offbeat outfitter. Cloud Ridge Naturalists doesn't offer a run-of-the-mill trip out West. On their one- to 10-day excursions into California, Colorado, Arizona, and Utah, you learn about subjects like butterflies, owls, wildflowers, and even something called dinosaur paleoecology. Call 303-459-3248.