

**Grand Canyon Pioneers Society, Inc.**  
(A Historical Association)  
*The Bulletin*

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October 2002

### Grand Canyon Aviation History

Ron Warren was our guest speaker on Saturday, September 21, at the Quality Inn in Tusayan. He gave us a great perspective of the history of airports in the Grand Canyon vicinity. Ron was the general manager of Grand Canyon Airlines for 13 years. He moved here from Juneau because his wife was tired of winter. So, of course, he arrived here in March 1980 in the middle of a snowstorm!

The first airplanes ever at Grand Canyon were part of a mission sent out from Ellington Field in Houston. The three airplanes had flown across the southern United States, up the coast, and over to Kingman. One by one, these Lincoln Standards flew over to the canyon. The significance of the dates is interesting to note. The first plane flew at 14,000 feet over the Diamond Creek area on February 24, 1919. The next day the second plane actually flew 2,000 feet below the rim. But the third day was February 26, 1919 - the day that Grand Canyon become Grand Canyon National Park. So, the plane piloted by Eric Nelson was the first plane to fly over the brand new Grand Canyon National Park.

In 1920, a plane flew to the canyon from Williams. At that time, Williams was using a strip that used to be an old ballfield by the sawmill. This plane flew over the El Tovar. It had come to test the air currents in and around the canyon, as they were unknown and considered dangerous. A photographer was on this flight. In 1921, a plane was flown over Plateau Point. Stephen Mather then promoted an idea to link all of the western national parks with air service, but it never came to fruition. Ellsworth Kolb became a pilot, and engaged the services of RV Thomas to come to the canyon. Thomas was a barnstormer. They convinced the Park Service to help clear an area on Plateau

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### GCPS Outings for 2002

**October 19:** "Below the Rim & Beyond the Lake" (Two Commanding Canyons-Grand Canyon & Glen Canyon's Lake Powell) slide show by Gary Ladd and **GCPS Board of Directors meeting.**

Meeting:	10:00 AM Little America-Pines Cafe 2515 E Butler Ave - Flagstaff
Lunch:	12:00 Noon Little America-Pines Cafe
Program:	2:00 PM NAU Cline Library Screening Room

Gary Ladd is a free-lance large format photographer specializing on the wilderness interior of Grand Canyon, the pristine sandstone landscapes surrounding Lake Powell and the slickrock terrain of southern Utah and northern Arizona.

His photographs have appeared in LIFE MAGAZINE, AIR AND SPACE, OMNI, NATURE CONSERVANCY, SIERRA, READER'S DIGEST, NEWSWEEK, National Geographic Books, GEO, PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER, MODERN PHOTOGRAPHY and many other periodicals, books, posters, cards and National Park Service displays. One of his photographs, of a fantastic lightning storm over Kitt Peak National Observatory, is on permanent display at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D. C.

His work has appeared in over 60 issues of ARIZONA HIGHWAYS. GRAND CANYON, TIME BELOW THE RIM is the largest photographic undertaking of his career. Other recent book projects include LAKE POWELL-- A PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY OF GLEN

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## GC Aviation History...continued from page 1

Point for a landing strip. Part of this area is the Plateau Point trail today. The plane, with Ellsworth and RV aboard, landed at Plateau Point on August 8, 1922. Emery, the other Kolb brother, had jogged down to take pictures of the event. The Kolbs then got excited about building an airfield for sightseeing ventures. They built one just outside of the park in the Forest Service land, since they had no luck trying to obtain a permit from the Park Service. They were able to acquire a mining claim from the Lauzons and scraped off an airstrip. They then proceeded to try to entice fliers to come there. They had few takers, and eventually the strip was abandoned.

An aircraft building company called Stout Motors was in the process of selling out to Ford. An employee of Stout, Parker Van Zant, received a letter from one Emery Kolb, talking about the potentials of using the Kolb Airfield. Van Zant contacted the Park Service, which was already in an antagonistic relationship with Kolb. The Park Service said that an airfield was a good idea - but why not build one out by Red Butte (therefore bypassing the Kolbs). Van Zant passed this idea along to his new boss - Henry Ford - and construction began on the Red Butte Airfield in 1927. In addition to a large hanger, 4 cottages and a Great House were built. The Great House was of the same quality as the El Tovar. All these structures either burned down or were taken down by the 1970s. One person of note used the Red Butte Airfield- Amelia Earhart. Scenic Airlines obtained the mail contract, as well as beginning sightseeing tours.



*El Tovar bus and Scenic Airways plane*  
[photos courtesy Dan Cassidy]

They flew Ford Tri-Motors, which could hold 14 passengers plus cargo. One of the more unusual loads of cargo was a group of orphaned fawns from the North Rim. The El Tovar, Hermit's Rest, and the Grand Lodge were frequently buzzed by these sightseeing planes. The problem was that the sightseeing season was only 4 months or so, and what could be done with the rest of the year? There was this little sleepy town called Phoenix down to the south in the desert where the weather remained pleasant throughout the winter months. In 1928, Parker Van Zant named a small airstrip there Sky Harbor. It was built with private funds for the city of Phoenix, exactly where it is today.

In 1929 the Crash occurred, ushering in the Great Depression. In 1930, this caused the closing of the Red Butte Airport. In 1935, it reopened, due to the National Park Service giving a water and air contract jointly to the Utah Parks Company and the Fred Harvey Company. This was operated by Glover Roxel. He had developed an axle for the Model T Ford, and hung around in car racing circles. This was how he met Eddie Rickenbacker, who got Roxel excited about getting a pilot's license. Roxel designed an air tour loop which is still being used today - over Diamond Creek, Havasupai, South Rim, Little Colorado, and North Rim. He also included a dam tour over the newly constructed Hoover Dam. In 1936, he was able to get \$40.00 a head for this tour. He built the Pierce Ferry Airstrip, and also the concession for an Inn on the recently backed up Lake Mead. He had the only bar for miles, and did quite well.

Things hummed along until 1941, when all airplanes were grounded on December 8. All airports were taken over by the government, and only military flights flew out of the Red Butte Airfield from 1942-45. The military also built the Valle Airstrip during this time.

In 1951 civil aviation began again at Red Butte with the Hudgins brothers. Another new development was the helicopter. It was a Bell 47, with a Ford car door on it. It operated out of a shack set-up near the current day Canyon

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Pines. This sightseeing helicopter could carry 2 passengers plus the pilot. In 1967 the current Grand Canyon Airport was built to compete with the Hudgins brothers at Red Butte. Also at this time was the building of the trans-canyon pipeline. Elling Halvorsen out of Seattle, seriously outbid everyone by his daring new concept. Instead of using the traditional means of constructing things in the canyon (Havasupai Indians and mules) he proposed using helicopters. The staging ground for this was by the Orphan Mine. They would roll the pipes to the edge of the canyon, hook them to the helicopter, and then pray the helicopter could struggle to airspeed. Needless to say, this operation was highly dangerous. Halvorsen himself spent 11 months in a hospital after a helicopter accident on the project. After the completion of the pipeline, Elling obtained a tiny piece of land from the Thurstons along Highway 64 where he operated a sightseeing helicopter business. John Siebold entered into a business partnership with Halvorsen, building the Grand Canyon Squire. Siebold also thought of cornering the market for overseas tourists, particularly from Japan. This is still operating via Las Vegas by Scenic Airlines for Grand Canyon sightseeing.

By 1981, 42,000 people a year were taking air tours over the canyon. In 1982, the Twin Otter de Havilland Vista Liner was introduced. This was a 19 passenger plane still being used today. A daily flight ran over to the VT strip on the North Rim. The combination of the high elevation, deer, cows and mud forced the closing of this in 1986. In June 1986, there occurred a tragic airplane/ helicopter crash over the canyon below the rim – 25 people were killed, including local resident and helicopter pilot John Thybony. This began the public outcry about the overflight issue, and the controversy still ensuing between the National Park Service and the air tour operators.

[Article by Nancy Green]

## Letters to the editor

Dear Editor,

Just a short note to wish Mr. Harrison a happy birthday.

My name is Steve Wilson and Ancel Taylor was my grandfather who owned the trading post at Peach Springs and was also involved in the search for the Hydes. If anybody would like to contact me, my E-Mail address is Steve70camaro@AOL.com.

My grandfather passed away on the 11th of November 1987 at 102 years of age but donated quite a bit of his stuff to the Mohave County Museum.

Sincerely, Steve Wilson

To: Grand Canyon Pioneer Society  
RE: August 17, 2002 – Maurice Castagne's Grand Canyon Orphan Mine talk - on the Maricopa Point, at the GCPS's Invitation.

We, Maurice and Lorraine, wish to "Thank" the GCPS for the opportunity to share a piece of history about mining in a very unique and pristine environment such as the Grand Canyon National Park. Who would believe!

Meeting with GCPS Members, all warmly, welcomed my wife and I, offered a rewarding reason and highlighted our trip. Our next trip to the GC will be to supply the finished book – "The Grand Canyon Orphan Mine."

Should you have questions or require additional information, please contact us at the Mina, Nevada address.

Sincerely yours,  
Maurice Castagne  
PO Box 438 - Mina NV 89422  
Date: 9/16/02

## GCPS Outings 2002 ...continued from page 1

CANYON NATIONAL RECREATION AREA, THE MORMON TRAIL, RAINBOW BRIDGE and LANDFORMS-HEART OF THE COLORADO PLATEAU, the last two as photographer and author.

He was awarded the 1997 gold award and the 1998 silver award in the Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism Competition (sponsored by the SATW Foundation) for best magazine color photo illustrations. He was also the recipient of the 1997 gold and 1998 silver Arizona Highways Award winner for Best Photography of the Year.

Gary has lived in Page, Arizona, along the Colorado River (just upstream from Grand Canyon, just downstream from Lake Powell) for 21 years. He is a Museum of Northern Arizona Ventures trip leader, former Sierra Club wilderness backpack trip leader, Arizona Highways photo workshop instructor and Elderhostel geology/photography instructor. He has rowed his wooden dory, Tatahotso, through the Grand Canyon several times since 1973 and has completed over 70 backpacking trips into Grand Canyon.

**November 16:** Beamer's Cabin and Boucher's Camp stabilization projects by Amy Horn, archaeologist for Grand Canyon National Park. Presentation at Cline Library at 1:30 PM.

**December:** No meeting

## Grand Canyon Pioneers Society Board of Directors Meeting Agenda

October 19, 2002, 10:30 AM

1. State of the Society - Lee Albertson
2. Minutes of the October 2001 Board of Directors Meeting - Nancy Green
3. Treasurer's Report - Linda Anderson
4. Proxy Votes (those Board Members not in attendance) - Lee Albertson
5. Results of the Election for 2003 Board of Directors members (Term: 2003, 2004, and 2005) - Nancy Green
6. Clarification of Membership: Individual and Family - Lee Albertson
7. Election of Officers: Election of a President, Vice President and Outing Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer for 2003 - Lee Albertson
8. Committee Chairman Pioneer Award, and Committee Chairman Community Service Projects - Lee Albertson
9. Scholarship Award: Status Report and allocation of Funds - Al Richmond
10. Cabin Restoration Project - John Azar
11. Membership Committee recommendations
12. Suggested Outings for 2003 - Carolyn Castleman
13. Other and new business - Lee Albertson
  - Bulk Mailing from Prescott
  - Community Project - Place names of other Powell Expedition members at the Powell Plateau
  - Community Project - Place signs at Historical Sites (Grandview, Hance, Kolb Airfield, etc)
  - New Member application / dues sent to Secretary / Treasurer
  - Outing announcements in Northern Arizona newspapers (Flagstaff, Williams, Prescott)
  - Update GCPS web site

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**Outings Contact Information:** Outings Coordinator is Carolyn Castleman, 18909 North 87th Drive, Peoria, AZ 85382; phone: 623-825-9971; email: AZlady2@juno.com.

*The Bulletin* welcomes comments, stories, or reflections and remembrances. Please send them to Diane Cassidy at 2112 Demerse Avenue, Prescott, AZ 86301; email: GCPioneers@yahoo.com.

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