

THE GREAT SOUTHWEST

A vibrant desert scene. The foreground is filled with a dense field of bright yellow poppies. In the background, a large, rugged rock formation rises against a clear blue sky. To the right, a distinctive Joshua tree stands out. The overall atmosphere is one of natural beauty and wilderness.

BY CHARLES McCARRY
PHOTOGRAPHED BY GEORGE F. MOBLEY

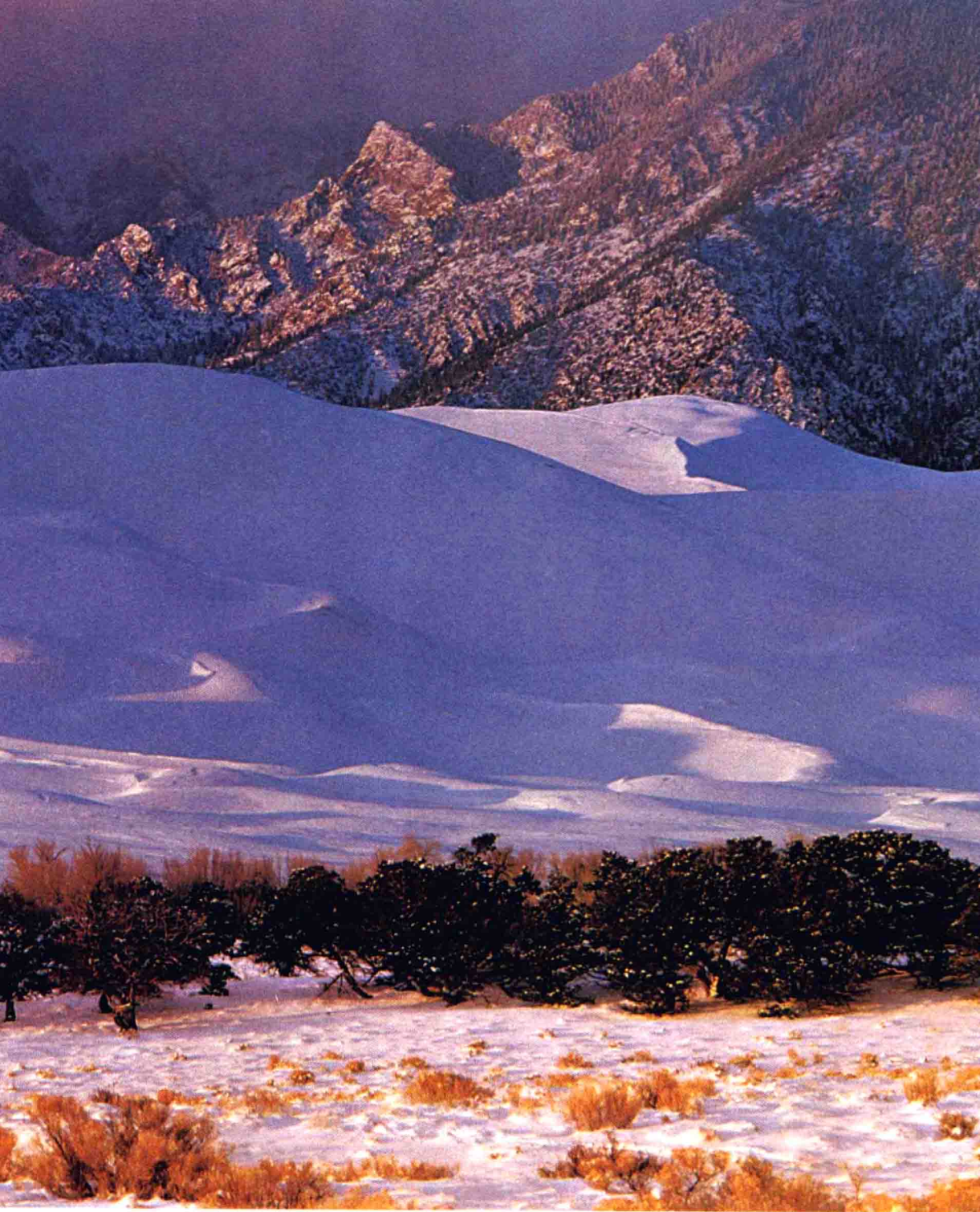
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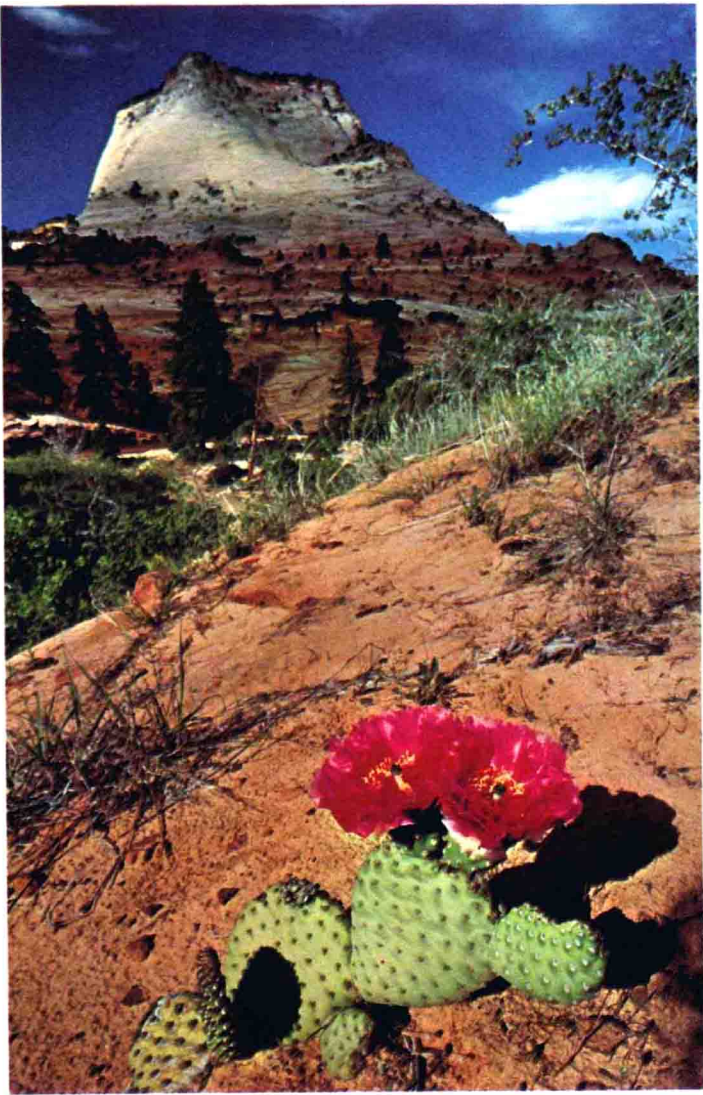
STEPHEN TRIMBLE

Contents

| | |
|---------------------|----|
| Foreword | 5 |
| An Introduction | 8 |
| The Long Valley | 20 |
| Plains and Prairies | 50 |
| The Cities | 82 |
| The Mountains | 88 |



| | |
|--------------------|-----|
| Canyon Country | 118 |
| The Plateau | 142 |
| The Desert | 168 |
| Acknowledgments | 196 |
| Additional Reading | 196 |
| Index | 197 |



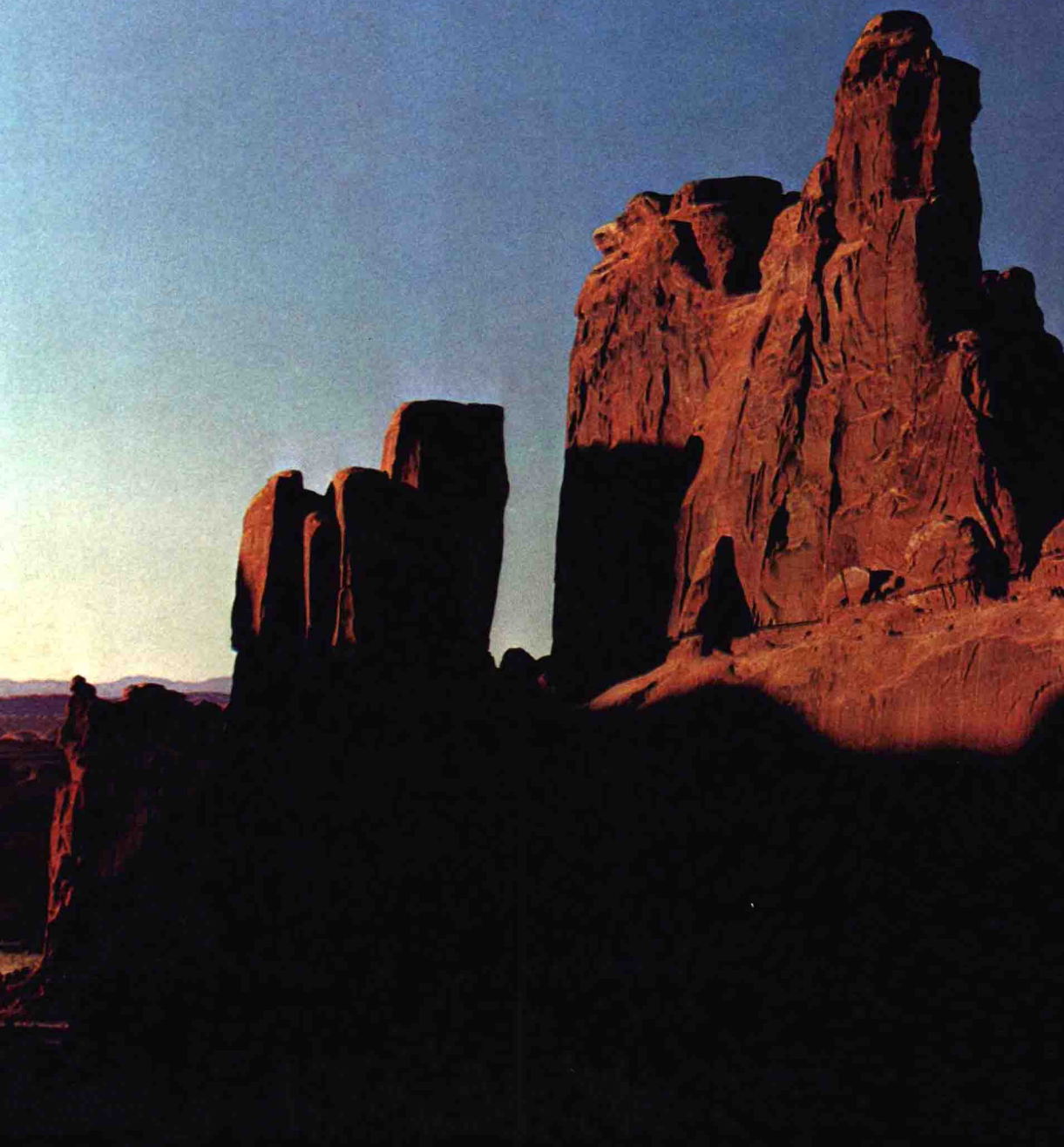
The Great SOUTHWEST

By Charles McCarry

Photographed by George F. Mobley

Prepared by the Special Publications Division

National Geographic Society, Washington, D. C.





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Published by

The National Geographic Society

GILBERT M. GROSVENOR, President

MELVIN M. PAYNE, Chairman of the Board

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ROBERT L. BREEDEN, Vice President, Publications
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Prepared by

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Surfing on the seats of their pants,
youngsters skim down the soft dunes at
White Sands National Monument in New
Mexico, largest gypsum desert in the world.

PAGES 6-7: December snows mantle the Great Sand Dunes at the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in southern Colorado. PAGES 2-3: Like skyscrapers flanking a city street, sandstone formations line Park Avenue in Arches National Park, Utah. PAGE 1: Magenta blossoms of a beavertail cactus, a member of the prickly pear family, add a spark of color to the southern Utah landscape of Zion National Park. HARDCOVER: Prickly pears thrive throughout the Southwest.

Foreword

I HAVE HAD A HAND in 94 National Geographic books, but this one, more than all the others, holds a special charm for me. It chronicles a sunburnt corner of our country whose geological wonders are rivaled only by the stalwart brand of people who live there, sustained by a pioneering spirit that won't go away.

For me, *The Great Southwest* is a book of memories. Both of my parents were born in Indian Territory long before Theodore Roosevelt's signature put Oklahoma's star on our flag. My mother, a quarter-blood Cheyenne, was born in a tepee, and she could remember *her* mother's frightening account of soldiers' bullets whining past during the fighting at Sand Hill in 1875, one of the last Indian skirmishes in the Territory.

This book also reminds us that the Southwest has, at times, been cruel to red man and white man alike. I grew up during the Dust Bowl days, and can recall the strange reddish brown clouds that rolled in to darken the sun. Chickens would go to roost at noon. And I can remember the exodus—battered old cars and trucks laboring past our house on U. S. Highway 66, heading west for the promised land.

Today a new and different Southwest greets my children when I take them there to visit. Drilling rigs dot the landscape. Modern farms, irrigated and fertilized, green the countryside. For several decades the people who left have been coming back, joined by thousands of newcomers. Ironically, the Southwest now finds itself the promised land.

Charles McCarry's lyrical text about this distinctive region rings true. For me it paints vivid pictures of the people, the places, the past. As I read I can hear the summer winds whisper in the cottonwoods; I can close my eyes and catch that special fragrance that only comes when rain freshens a thirsty prairie.

George Mobley's photographic genius presents a brilliant array of images from one of the richest scenic areas on the planet. His mountains soar majestically. His wild flowers duplicate nature's most extravagant palettes. His sunsets radiate a special reverence.

World traveler and author D. H. Lawrence felt such reverence when he first visited the Southwest. "It certainly has changed me for ever . . . the moment I saw the brilliant, proud morning shine high up over the desert of Santa Fe, something stood still in my soul. . . ."

There are many different ways to delineate the Southwest; the boundaries may be historical, political, sociological, climatic. The Southwest of this book coincides with the essentially arid zone that centers upon and fans out from the desert provinces of New Mexico and Arizona; it takes in most of Texas, portions of Oklahoma, Colorado, Utah, and Nevada, and the desert country of southern California.

Surprisingly, perhaps, the Southwest's shortage of rainfall has not stifled it, but rather has produced a land as diverse and beautiful as any on earth, and has bred a people as proud, as fiercely independent, yet as friendly as you'll find anywhere. The reader need not be a Southwesterner to become totally absorbed in the pages that follow.

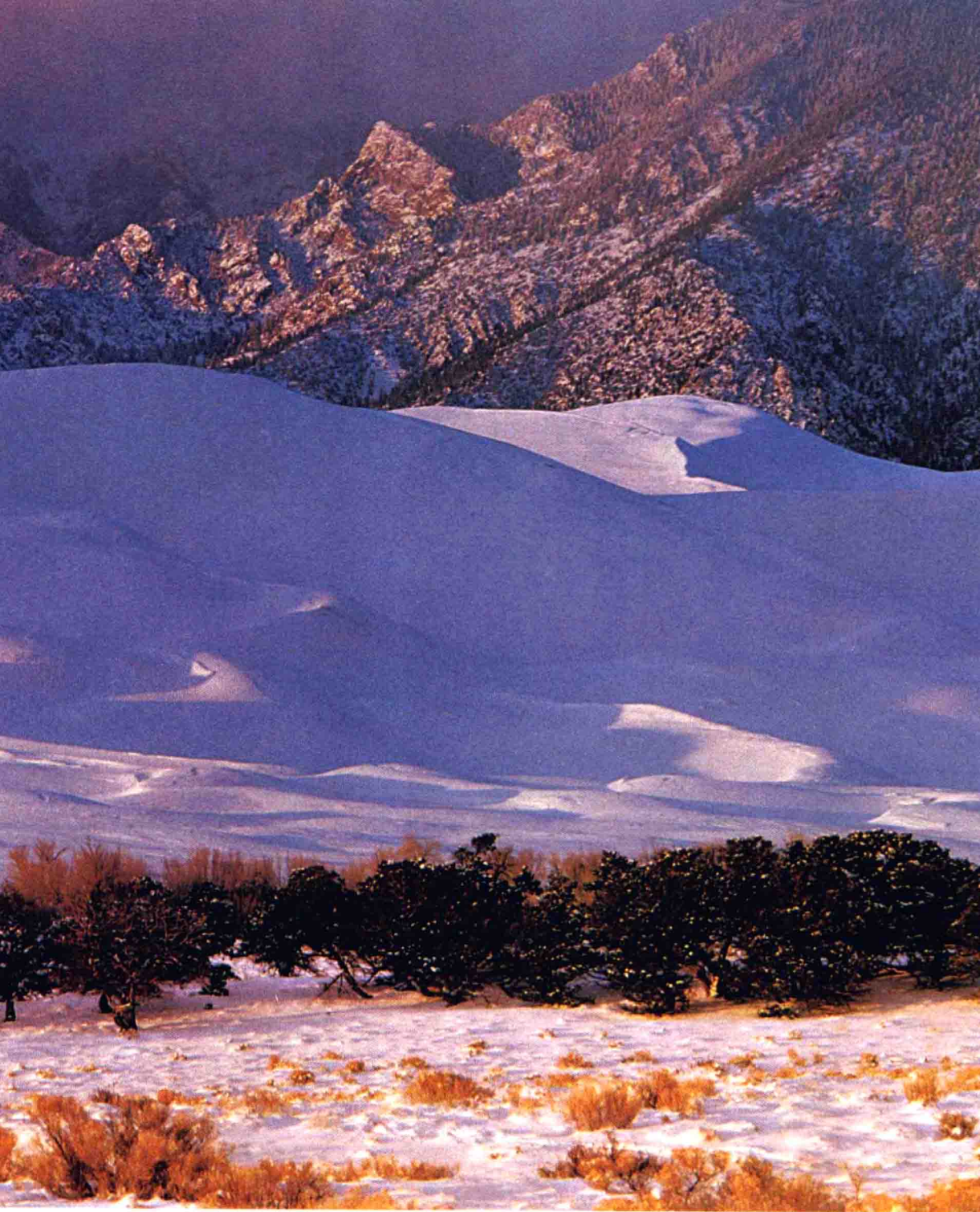
DONALD J. CRUMP



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Contents

| | |
|---------------------|----|
| Foreword | 5 |
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| | |
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| Additional Reading | 196 |
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*Stately bison graze beneath gold-lined clouds at the
Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma.
Established in 1905, the refuge now shelters 625 bison,
fulfilling a wish voiced by the Comanche chief
Quanah Parker: "It would make my heart glad to
see a herd once more roaming about Mount Scott."*



"Everyone, I think, has lived in the Southwest in his imagination...."

AN INTRODUCTION

IT WAS THE FIRST DAY of July, but the San Juan Mountains of southern Colorado still carried last winter's snowpack on their flanks of granite and alpine tundra. Our little aircraft flew in and out of bright rainbows as the setting sun found the spectrum in rain squalls that beaded the windshield at 13,000 feet. To the north Uncompahgre Peak, driven like a flint hatchet into the American wilderness, rose high above our fragile machine.

Below us lay the Continental Divide. Not just the divide, but the place where, within reach of the eye, rise the headwaters both of the Rio Grande and of several tributaries of the Colorado River. On the eastern side, green and gently rounded, sparkling rivulets emerged from fields of snow to form little lakes, then tumbled downward, eventually to become the Rio Grande. On the steeper western slope, sun and snow sent other infant streams to join the Colorado in its 1,400-mile journey through canyon and desert to the Gulf of California.

Here is where the American Southwest begins. These alpine snows are what make the Southwest live. Totalling several hundred inches every winter, they are still melting in high summer when chocolate will dissolve in its wrapper in El Paso or El Centro. Snowmelt, dammed into great lakes, will drip from irrigation pipes and grow a crop of sweet red grapefruit for a farmer named Sam Henderson whom I came to know along the Rio Grande. Water from these same snows will push million-dollar crops toward the sunlight through the desert soil of California's Imperial Valley. Flowing through the turbines of high dams, it will make electricity to light the neon of Las Vegas and turn cameras in Hollywood, filming images of the great Southwest that will enter the minds of people all over the world, there to be stored as legend.

Everyone, I think, has lived in the Southwest in his imagination. As a boy growing up in the Berkshire Hills of Massachusetts, I would on some winter days finish my schoolwork early. When that happened, my teacher, Addie Dyer, would let me go to the unheated library that was attached to our two-room school and read. Bundled up in a woolen coat, felt boots on my feet, I would sit on the polished hemlock floor and through the clouds of my breath see mountain men and red men, cowboys and outlaws galloping along the lines of type. I may have risen every morning to milk a herd of Guernseys, and followed a slow-footed Belgian mare named Betsy through fields of timothy and clover. But in my dreams I drove Texas longhorns across the boundless plains and slept by a mesquite fire with a saddle for my pillow. In later years I was astonished to find how many boys, encountered as sober grown-ups in Berlin and Nairobi, Bombay and Tokyo, had been my unseen companions on this trail of make-believe; I even ran into a few in Dallas and Albuquerque.

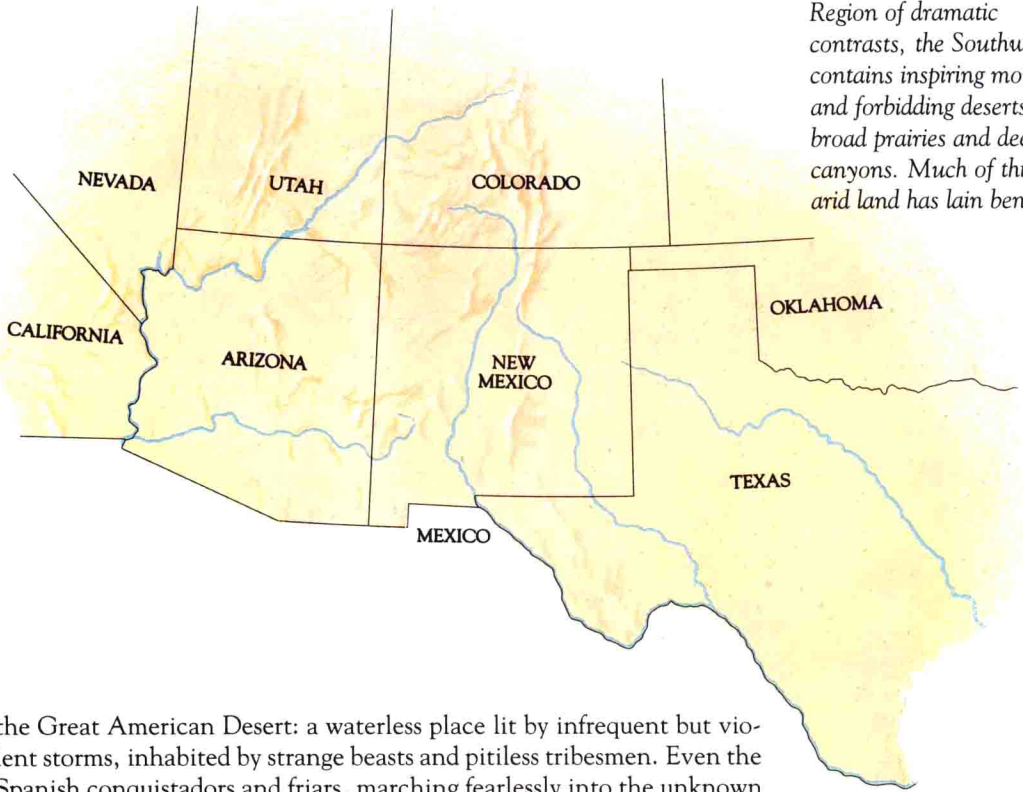
The Southwest, then, is a state of mind as much as it is a geographical region. It is a generous and honest state of mind. The people of the Southwest greet you with a smile. If you ask a question, they will give you a plain answer straight from a mind that is made up. They will feed a stranger before he mentions that he is hungry, give him a drink of water because they know he must be thirsty after traveling through a dry land. And they'll talk, with humor and love, of the things that matter to them: their families, their work, their faith, and their freedom.

Back east, we talk about "the land." Out here, that is too small a term. Southwesterners speak of "the country." They would ask me, almost always, "How do you like this country?" And always I would reply, from a mind that was made up 40 years ago in that chilly Massachusetts

library: "I love this country." For when I came here at last, I found the reality more vivid, more stirring, vaster and more American than the idea. Paper and ink, paint and film cannot capture the colors of the country, the music of the speech, the scent of snow water in the crags, of sage on the high plateau, of herds and flocks upwind in seas of prairie grass.

For generations this Eden was called a dead land, the "badlands,"

Region of dramatic contrasts, the Southwest contains inspiring mountains and forbidding deserts, broad prairies and deep canyons. Much of this now-arid land has lain beneath



the Great American Desert: a waterless place lit by infrequent but violent storms, inhabited by strange beasts and pitiless tribesmen. Even the Spanish conquistadors and friars, marching fearlessly into the unknown behind the Cross, never grasped the whole of this country. They harvested few souls among the wandering tribes who, most of them, called themselves simply "The People" and had no idea that there existed another people who would persist in regarding all the tribes as a single race called "Indians." The Peoples, who heard prayers issuing from the earth, the creatures, the plants, and the wind, had been here for thousands of years before the first Spaniards came.

When the Spaniards did come, they were lost and naked, the shipwrecked survivors of an expedition of 400 that had set out in 1528 to explore a new royal province stretching from Florida to the Rio Grande. After eight years among the tribes, who had in turn succored and enslaved them, four of the 400 found their way to a Spanish settlement in what is now northern Mexico. Three of the survivors were Spanish aristocrats; the fourth was a black Moorish slave named Esteban. Their leader, Álgar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, repeated dramatic tales told to them by the Indians, tales of cities of fabulous wealth lying to the north.

The Seven Cities of Cibola, with turquoises (perhaps emeralds!) studding the doorframes of noble houses, beguiled the imagination of the Viceroy of New Spain. He sent an expedition led by a Franciscan, Fray Marcos de Niza, in search of the cities of treasure. Esteban guided the party, for none of the aristocrats wished to return to the interior. In

recurring prehistoric seas. For thousands of years, Indians lived quietly in balance with nature. Today's Southwesterners shape nature to their will. Digging mines, damming rivers, irrigating fields, building cities, they have fashioned an optimistic society that attracts thousands of new adherents every week.

May 1539 the Moor reached the first of the Seven Cities. There, when the inhabitants fell upon him, he found not riches but death.

Returning home, Fray Marcos reported to the viceroy that he had viewed the hostile city from a distance and that it was larger than the City of Mexico. In 1540 the famous expedition led by Francisco Vázquez de Coronado found the fabled Cities of Cibola. They were six, not



Sandhill cranes take wing over Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico. At the eastern edge of the Rio Grande Valley, a full moon shines on winter's leafless branches on the slopes of Sierra Blanca Peak near White Sands National Monument.

seven. The one in which Esteban had died was called Hawikuh. There were no emeralds in Hawikuh; like all its sister pueblos, it was a place where the greatest luxury was a strip of shade thrown on the dust by a low house made of rocks.

Seeking treasure, the Spaniards in fact brought treasure to the Southwest. In time Spanish horses transformed young tribesmen into mounted hunters and warriors. Spanish settlements were ravaged; women and children were captured and bred into the tribes. The Comanche boasted that they let the Europeans remain only because they raised such good horses for the braves to steal.

Still, the search for wealth continued to draw outsiders. Mountain men, French and American, arrived in the early 19th century, seeking the precious beaver in the mountain streams. They discovered high passes, explored rivers, and more than any other whites, merged with the land as the Peoples had done. But just as the supply of pelts for beaver-skin hats was running out, the silk hat became fashionable in London and Paris and New York, and this vivid band of adventurers vanished after its brief day.

In 1821, the year in which Mexico seized its independence from Spain, an American named Stephen F. Austin arrived in Texas at the head of a group of colonists. Austin sought the most lasting treasure of all: land. He found it with a vengeance. His Texans rebelled against Mexico, established a republic, then joined the Union, and the Mexican War ensued. By the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed in 1848, Mexico ceded all of its territory north of the Rio Grande—more than half of old Mexico and at least a quarter of what is now the United States—to the victorious Americans. What had been the Mexican North became the American Southwest. But Spanish-speaking folk on both sides of the Rio Grande still call that stream *Río Bravo*. And, as a third-generation native-born American told me in an elegant restaurant in Laredo, in Spanish: “This is occupied Mexico—love it or leave it.”

The promise of treasure brought waves of blue-eyed people galloping into this new American outland. In Texas and Oklahoma they found free range and feral cattle and, eventually, oil. Farther west, silver





Light snow and ground fog create an eerie atmosphere at Monument Valley on the Utah-Arizona border. The

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