



Hole in the Rock Road



Coyote Gulch

I close my eyes and can feel it. The murky red water of the Escalante squishing in my shoes, the scalding southern Utah sun permeating into my sun-screened skin, I feel the fleeting rush of wind pushed through the canyon, and the weight of my pack on my shoulders. I blink and now I feel the hammering of the oil drills, ripping into the red earth, unearthing arrowheads and the roots of struggling trees. I feel pain. I feel the very core of who I am ripped apart at the seams. The desert cries tears of oil, while I cry for it.

This place formed me. The lone tree growing precariously out of the cliff taught me to be resilient. The potholes holding each drop of rain the sky offered taught me to take nothing for granted. The river carving its own path through the rock taught me that anything is possible, and to mark my own path. The towering canyons gave me humbleness. Jackrabbits that kept just enough distance taught me to be self aware. I learned to trust myself, watching lizards perform unimaginable feats, dancing across the slick rock. I gained respect for culture through the ruins, and a love for storytelling through hieroglyphics. From the snake bathing himself on the rock I learned that even those who appear different or intimidating are pure at heart, that we all share similar desires. My imagination pushed boundaries trying to fathom the size of the universe staring at the unpolluted night sky. I learned to never stop playing as I watched my grandfather become jubilant at the mere mention of the southwest. Through climbing amongst the cliffs I learned that nothing worth having is ever easy. I learned how to leave my mark

respectfully by writing weather-grams with my grandmother. I learned that the journey holds gifts that one can never predict. I learned to be good, to be kind, respectful, and gracious. This place allowed me to begin to understand my place the world and embrace who I am and can be.

The lessons I have learned here challenge any of those that I have learned in school, at home, or traveling. For one place to hold this much magic and influence is unfathomable, and the fact that it exists, extraordinary. It's not just me who holds this idolization of the desert, many before me have loved this place and many with me do now. The desert is something that can tie those together who otherwise would know nothing of the other. This place forms friendships, relationships, and self-discovery. It fosters those who dare challenge its dry grounds and embraces each who steps a well-intentioned foot within it. Yet, with all the power and grandiosity this place holds, it is only as strong as those who stand behind it. With no feet to run and no hands to fight, those who have seen its power, who believe in the magic, must stand up for it. And as much as the desert taught me to be good, to be humble, and gracious, the desert taught me to be strong. To fight for what I believe in even if the sky's run dry and the rivers run low. I have watched tadpoles thrive in tiny puddles, and flowers bloom in the driest ground, I have seen trees in cliffs, and valleys carved through sheer rock, I have seen the struggle of beauty, and the wonder this struggle creates. Doing my part to ensure that these places will stay intact for future generations is invaluable. There is no monetary amount that will ever be able to challenge the significance of these places, no teacher good enough, no parent wise enough, no book truthful enough. There is not a thing on this Earth that can give what this place has given.

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