Author's
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By Helen Hollyer

Herpetological Epiphany

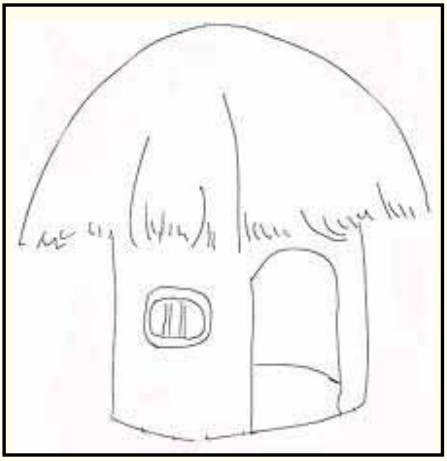
SWEAT TRICKLED DOWN MY SPINE as I sat in my stick-and-mud latrine. It was midday, and the humid heat of the tropical rainforest lay heavily on the land. In the somnolence of the afternoon, even the normally loquacious bird and insect life was silent.

I had returned to my hut during the hottest part of the day to rest because the Bassa people, my anthropological informants, were similarly ensconced in huts or

farm shelters, waiting until the sun relented and life began to stir again near sunset.

After a brief visit to the latrine, I planned to return to my hut to drink tepid water, to fantasize about eating chocolate ice cream, rare roast beef and other unobtainable delicacies and to write up the morning's field notes.

I wore a short, sleeveless cotton dress, sandals and little else. My shoulder-length hair was gathered in a clip at the back of my head to allow any breeze to cool my neck. A feeling of lassitude crept over me. Half asleep, I continued to sit on the wood seat, too lethargic to open the door and walk to my hut.



Suddenly I felt a cool, smooth touch on the skin of my right leg. Looking down, I saw a thick-bodied snake undulating slowly over my bare foot. The distinctive scale pattern and thick body identified it as a puff adder, one of West Africa's most dangerous reptiles. I froze, riveted in place by terror, scarcely daring to breathe. The snake stopped its forward motion and remained motionless on my foot.

The Bassa kill all snakes first and then check their identities because several venomous species inhabit the area. They have a particular fear of the puff adder, which they call the cassava snake, because it lies unmoving and unseen among the cassava plants of their farm plots.

Unlike most snakes, puff adders don't move away when they sense the vibrations of human footfalls. An incautious step on a puff adder hidden in low-growing vegetation can result in a fatal bite on the foot.

Bare-legged tappers and slashers on rubber plantations were especially vulnerable because of the ground-covering plants used to reduce soil erosion – perfect cover for puff adders. Friends at the nearby Liberian Agricultural Corporation plantation had told me that the plantation typically lost one man a month to snakebite.

When I took a first aid course at the University of Oregon in preparation for my sojourn in West Africa, I had asked the instructor what to do if I were to be bitten by a poisonous snake.

"Get yourself as quickly as possible to the nearest hospital," he responded.

"I don't think that would be feasible," I said. "I expect

to be in the bush many hours' travel from the hospital in Monrovia, Liberia's capital city."

"In that case, you should purchase antivenom for the various poisonous species in your particular locality," he instructed. "It will be expensive, and you will have to keep the antivenom refrigerated."

"That wouldn't be possible, either," I said. "I won't have electricity to run a refrigerator."

He threw up his hands and made his final suggestion. "Then sit down and smoke your last cigarette."

Irritated at his nonchalance, I snapped, "I don't smoke."

Now here I was in Africa, trapped in a latrine and defenseless against a puff adder bite. My only chance was to avoid being bitten.

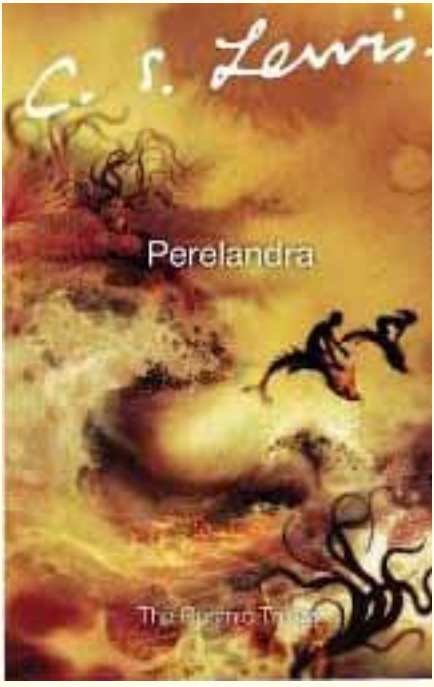
I would have to wait for the snake to slither into a corner of the cramped latrine, and then, hoping that it would remain calm, attempt to squeeze slowly around and out the inward-opening door.

As time slowly passed and the snake continued to rest on my foot, I remembered a passage from one of my favorite

books, "Perelandra," by C.S. Lewis, the second volume in his trilogy of that name.

The hero, Ransom, has been kidnapped by Dr. Weston, an evil physicist, and taken to Venus (Perelandra) on a primitive spaceship. After a series of misadventures, Ransom flees across the Venusian ocean on the back of a giant fishlike creature, pursued by Weston on another fish. By now, it has become evident that the Devil has possessed the body of Weston.

After the exhausted fish he is riding dives and comes up under the only continent on Venus, Ransom finds himself cast ashore in a cavern lit by subterranean fires. Weston's body continues to follow Ransom, who looks ahead to see a monstrous centipede-like creature with multiple legs and gaping jaws emerging from a hole.



Ransom is overcome with horror – he knows that he is looking at his doom. Just then, Weston's arms envelope him in a death grip. Ransom breaks loose and,

with his last strength pushes Weston over the cliff and into the fires below where the body is consumed by flame. Ransom turns back to the animal he had so feared, only to realize that it, too, is God's creature – it is not inherently evil and it bears him no malice. It turns and retreats down the hole from which it emerged.

My eyes fixed on the puff adder, I observed the intricate pattern of keeled scales with their subtle shades of cream, beige, taupe, tan and brown. Ebony chevrons marked its back and the heavy, blunt-nosed triangular head.

Gradually my fear lessened. I began to appreciate the creature's beauty and the superb natural camouflage that had concealed it in the shadows. I could detect no animosity toward me. My foot seemed to be merely a minor obstacle in its path.

Eventually I was overcome with wonder at the snake's perfection. I recognized it as a fellow creature. Purely by chance, our paths had intersected at precisely the same point in space and time.

The snake moved into the corner and gathered its glistening coils into a circle. I quietly eased my way around the door and out of the latrine. I never saw it again. ■

PREPOSTEROUS Experience

BY G. E. McKELVEY

The six-day Preposterous Landscape photography workshop that I attended in October 2010 certainly lived up to its name.

I signed up for the *Arizona Highways* workshop knowing that it might be canceled because only four people registered for a trip that normally hosts 15 or more. That didn't detour *Arizona Highways*, however. On a rainy Sunday afternoon, four participants, one leader and a volunteer began what turned out to be a most rewarding experience.

CHECK OUT GREG MCKELVEY'S **WEB SITE**

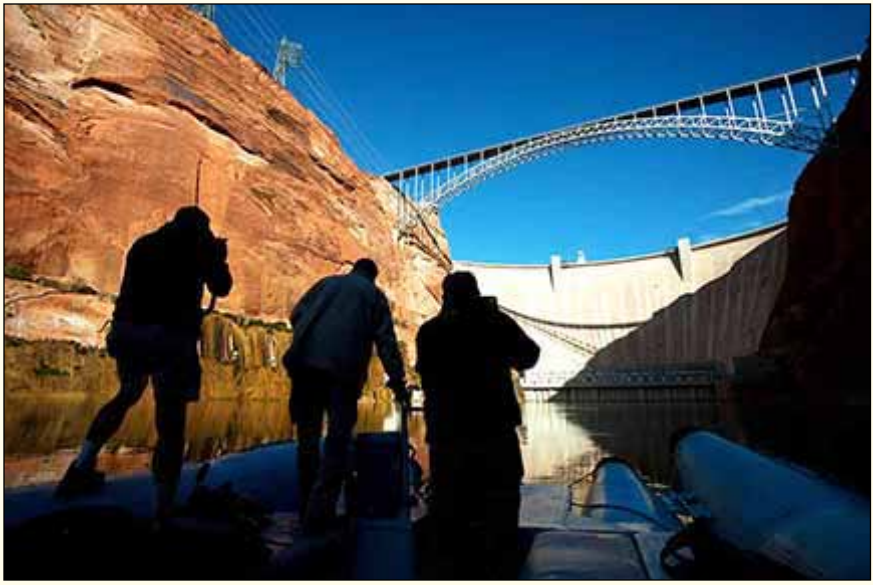
Day One: October 17

From the Cliff Dwellers Lodge in the late afternoon, we quickly left to take an overview of the Colorado River at the Navajo Bridge that spans Marble Canyon. As soon as we arrived, it started to rain hard. The weather forecast for the week was rain or thunderstorms. After a few brief lessons on perspective, our leader Gary Ladd suggested during his evening photography presentation that we might not have to follow the published itinerary to achieve the workshops objectives.

Day Two: October 18

All of us crowded into a van to the base of Glen Canyon Dam for a guided raft trip down the Colorado River. The early morning light unveiled the dark clouds and hard rain over the Vermillion Cliffs. Access is via the Glen Canyon construction and maintenance tunnel to the base of the dam. Soon we are looking up at the curved dam and arched steel girder truss bridge anchored high on the sandstone walls. The first of the many lessons included framing and somehow finding foreground for the awesome view up to the concrete structure holding back the Colorado River to be Lake Powell.

The river flat and reflecting like a mirror glass made by



Photographing Glen Canyon Dam, Arizona

Corning. Still cloudy but some blue sneaking in, the raft pointed down river into mist and a few silhouettes of fishermen along the banks. The light reflecting off the cliffs on one side tinted the water and opposite walls with colors the rainbow never had. We visited petroglyphs and looked in awe up to the people at the Horseshoe bend overlook where we would be later in the week. More sun but only a few boats and rafts were on the river. Guess the weather forecast kept people away, and our reward was a reflecting

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Click any photograph in this article and see an enlargement of it.

river for the entire trip. We were able to stay on the river until 5 p.m., two hours longer than planned.

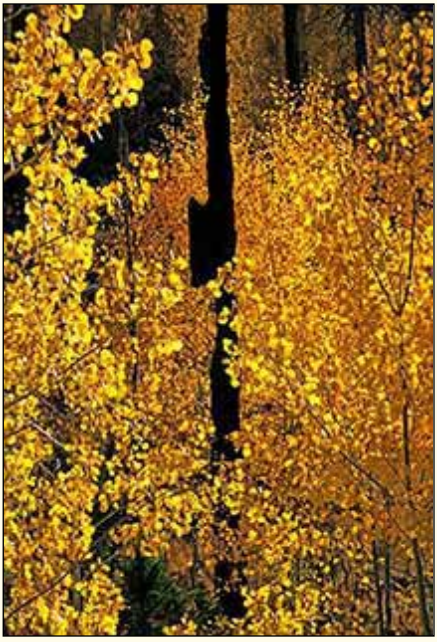
Bounce light reflections on the Colorado River, Glen Canyon, Arizona.

Our lesson was foreground, color, framing, leading lines and getting the color curves to be our friend. Gary carefully led by example as well as working with each of us while we reviewed our efforts.

Day Three: October 19

Before breakfast and sunrise, we climbed in to our van for a early morning sunrise session at the Navajo Bridge over Marble Canyon. The objective was to see the light of

the sun on the Vermillion Cliffs and capture that first golden light. Seeing the California Condors warming in the sun was extra! The rain during the previous night prevented us from hiking into Marble Canyon's Cathedral. Instead, we toured the north rim of the Grand Canyon decked out in late fall colors. Along with the excellent geology overview we learned to work and wait for the clouds and sun to improve the view of a grove of yellow aspen trees flourishing in the burnt remains from a forest fire.



Back lit Aspen, North Rim Grand Canyon.

Day Four: October 20

Again before breakfast, we drove toward Lee's Ferry to watch the sun rise on the balanced rocks. Using the long shadows and a model or two, we worked to find ways to capture the size and magnitude of these giant boulders. Oh, how do you get scale and make it part of the scene

without it being overpowering. The blue sky and clouds offered a challenge to frame a photo with the blue sky, a mega boulder and leading lines in the foreground. Work it, work it and work it again paid off in the photographic images we captured. We left for Page with a stop along the way at Horseshoe Bend to look at the river 1,000 feet below.

Unusual point of view. Horseshoe Bend of the Colorado River in Glen Canyon, Arizona.

Continued next page.

Day Five: October 21

Up for breakfast and down to the marina to rent a boat for a day on Lake Powell. Cloudy and dark at times, sun at other times, we viewed rock formations perched on narrow pedestals called the Hamburger Rocks, Weathering Pit Ridge where deep big holes are worn in the variegated colored sandstones and Cookie Jar Butte, Padre Bay with red sand dunes (and golf balls) finally to Dominguez rock where one of Gary's famous photos was taken.

Foreground of cracked white rocks with the tower silhouetted to the black threatening skies behind. We took

Dramatic foreground on Lake Powell, Utah.

photos and Gary was impressed enough with the light to drag out his classic 5 x 7 camera. Looking to the west, we not only could see the clouds, but also gaps were light may well change the view in front of us. Patience says our leader. Wait to see if the sun will grace the rock faces with land filtered in low-angle light. And yes it did. As we return to the boat for the trip back, the classic Arizona sunset lights our path. For once we saw the sunset for what it is as well as what it does to the scene.

Arizona sunset over Lake Powell, Arizona

Day Six: October 22

Up early and in the van found us driving to an overlook

along the highway to see the sun find the Vermillion cliff and red rock outcropping in the foreground. Clouds gave us three windows of changing light from first golden light, to shade to a splash of rays again to cloud and one last flash of light all in the space of 25 minutes.

After breakfast we headed down into the sinuous corridors of Lower Antelope Canyon. The entrance does not look wide enough to get in and once inside there is rarely enough space for two people to pass, let alone set up a tripod. Dripping skies and clouds filtered the light enough that we did not see the classic purple, red and orange col-

Navajo flute player, lower Antilope Canyon, Arizona

ors so famous in these slot canyons. Each bend presented a change in shapes and settings.

During the closing lunch at a local restaurant, Gary Ladd agreed that this was the best workshop ever! Flexibility, changing weather, glassy reflections, cooperative lighting and the special talents of Gary and volunteer Dave Halgrimson gave us all a unique learning experience. And learn we did. Oh, and yes the extra spectacular photos, we got some of those, too.

The workshop turned out to be a Preposterous Experience of a lifetime. ■

Two photographers for scale weathering Pit Ridge, Lake Powell, Utah.

Eucharist

Hilda told me the doctor's verdict
while I sat on her hospital bed and peeled an orange.
It was Christmas afternoon.
I handed her a slice, and she said she'd refused treatments.
Hilda said she needed no more time.
She said she was ready.
She said she'd been hungry for oranges.

—Tina Howard

CABIN on the Hoquarton

BY PAUL KING

The Hoquarton Slough, named for a homesteader, winds through the tidelands against the north edge of the old part of Tillamook, Oregon. Motorists may miss it entirely as they speed north on U.S. 101, past the cheese factory and on to the beaches. In the early 1900s, the slough teemed with spawning salmon, so abundant they were harvested with pitchforks and sold for a dime apiece in the village.

A few coastal steamers, like the doomed Argo that went aground in a storm with my grandparents in 1911, navigated the Willamette and Columbia rivers. Then they stopped at Astoria before turning southward along the Pacific shore,

made hazardous entry into Tillamook Bay and on up the slough to Tillamook. They could only navigate the shallow waterway at high tide when there was ample salt water to keep the boat free of the muddy bottom.

The slow vessels moved Tillamook cheese to Portland and returned with goods for local shops. They also carried a dozen or so passengers in both directions. Those times had passed before my birth in 1926. By the late 1930s, the salmon and steamers and mills were long gone and the slough had become a haven for adolescent boys. A deserted mill, abandoned log rafts and railroad trestle cried out to us, along with the woods where we found material to build a log cabin and to spend overnighters in "the rough," only blocks from home.

Entrance to our playground was down the garden path of a kindly pharmacist who never forgot his boyhood. He and his wife did not mind occasional youthful trespassers as long as we disturbed no plantings, ate no berries from his garden, stole no chickens and latched the gates behind us. It was a hard

but acceptable bargain for a shortcut to a young man's wilderness.

Our benefactor stacked in his woodshed the unsold magazines from his drugstore on Main Street, covers removed for dealer rebates and fuel for his furnace. Temptation was relentless and we occasionally appropriated a few with titles like "For Men Only" and "Red Hot Pepper." They furnished reading material, fuel for our barrel stove and TP for overnighters at the cabin.

Beyond the garden were railroad tracks. In peak years, the Southern Pacific delivered logs to three mills and moved lumber, veneer and plywood and cheese to markets

in Portland and beyond. Trains traversed the siding and a long trestle at least once daily although passenger service from Portland to the coast ceased in 1933 with the advent of paved highways.

There were times a lad or two ignored the warning signs and got caught on the trestle with the train approaching. We were forced to take refuge on one of the small platforms with barrels full of water placed strategically to quench small fires accidentally set by the coal-fired locomotives. There we faced the wrath of the engineer who shook his fist and swore in passing while we cowered behind the barrels to escape the stream of steam and curses.

We filled our hours by playing hide and seek in the old mill. Most of its machinery had been auctioned off. Gaping holes remained where green lumber once moved on endless chains from one saw to another. There were hiding places big enough to hold a platoon of Boy Scouts, which we were. The rotting log raft was our bridge across the slough on the trail to the cabin.

Meanwhile, parents began to imagine that their precious boys might become trapped beneath a log raft and drown, be crushed under a locomotive, fall through rotting timbers in the old mill and lord knows what else. Can you imagine that? One of our gang overheard his mother say to

his dad, "Why, maybe those boys are smoking or inviting girls down there. I think you better see what they are doing." And so it came to pass that we had our only inspection and, forewarned, slyly left not one piece of incriminating evidence in view.

Our eavesdropping pal reported later: "Dad told mom, I think you have an over-active imagination. Those boys have built a cabin with four bunks, made a stove of an old metal barrel and even created a privy nearby. I think it's a healthy outlet for their energy. Why, I found no cigarette butts at all. They need a little praise for enterprise instead of interference from us."

Our cabin, constructed of alder logs, was sturdy enough. But it was vulnerable to seasonal flooding. When the water rose high enough, it floated the cabin apart and strewed stove, chimney, bunks and logs about the tidelands. Spring drew us to the site to survey the damage, to collect the pieces, to replace what was missing and to ready the cabin for another season. It was our haven and pride and creation.

In old-age conversation, survivors still speak of the cabin, the slough, the bonfires, the trestle, the mill, the privy, the floods and the ghost stories. And the boy in each of us springs to life once more. ■

Authors

HELEN HOLLYER spent her early years in academia; her pursuit of a doctorate in cultural anthropology (it eluded her) ended when she realized that she was learning more and more about less and less and that she needed to find honest employment. Before abandoning formal education, she researched marriage patterns among the Bassa, a slash-and-burn agricultural people of the secondary rainforests of Liberia, West Africa. After her return to the United States, she engaged in serial careers that included residential real estate, insurance and presently reporter/photographer/editor/publisher of The Creswell Chronicle, a weekly community newspaper in Oregon. Other interests include investigating the natural history of her 87-acre property; collecting art glass, signed first editions and Asian antiques; and playing with her Doberman companion Loki and Let's Do Lunch, her American Saddlebred mare. **EMAIL HELEN.**

GREGORY ELLIS McKELVEY trained as a geologist focused on field applications at the University of Montana and Franklin & Marshall College. He has serviced and participated in exploration with Nicol Industrial Minerals, Bear Creek Mining, Homestake, Cominco and Phelps Dodge. He led several mineral assessment programs in the USGS in the early 1990s. Today, he is the president of Animas Resources and serves on the board of directors for several junior and growing resource companies. He not only uses a hammer and other tools to check rocks, but also carries camera equipment to photograph landscapes where those rocks reside. You can view a number of his photographs at www.gempressphotos.com. **EMAIL GREG.**

TINA HOWARD writes: "Poetry is the most visual of all forms: a sort of photography for the soul. At its best it allows us to distill and share an emotion or event that otherwise would require 10,000 words. This is true of the mnemonic histories, elegies and character sketches as well as wholly personal insights, feeling-driven soliloquies and snapshots of a moment. I like them all. I'm not a very prolific poet. I admire Sheryl Nelms' capacity to remain in a state of poetic awareness and to write so abundantly. My inspiration is more sporadic, so I tend to write in fits and starts with 6 or 8 poems clustered within a couple of months, then nothing for a few years. 'Eucharist' was previously published at Howard College in Big Spring's Thistles magazine. It recalls my dear friend Hilda Butts, who despite her diagnosis lived almost two more years alone in her own apartment, doing her own shopping and housekeeping, enjoying her life and setting an example for everyone around her." **EMAIL TINA.**

PAUL KING was born, reared and schooled in Tillamook, Oregon, the land of cheese, trees and ocean breeze. He trained to be a naval aviator, but WWII ended before he earned his wings. He entered the University of Washington on the G.I. Bill as a pre-medical student, majoring in chemistry, but became neither doctor nor chemist. Paul instead persuaded a reluctant editor to let him try reporting. After his wife, who died recently, writing became the love of his life for 12 years in two Washington State cities. When two daughters entered college, he shifted to PR for western lumbermen, which eventually took him to Washington D.C. as an itinerant lobbyist. When asked which was most rewarding, he always replies, "Newspapers for satisfaction, PR for the check. But I left my heart with reporting." Paul resides in Beaverton, Oregon. The late Roy Paul Nelson recruited him for AAPA. **EMAIL PAUL.**