

PIONEER POLYGAMISTS
and Their Time in Prison

Phoenix's Surprising
INDIAN ART MARKET

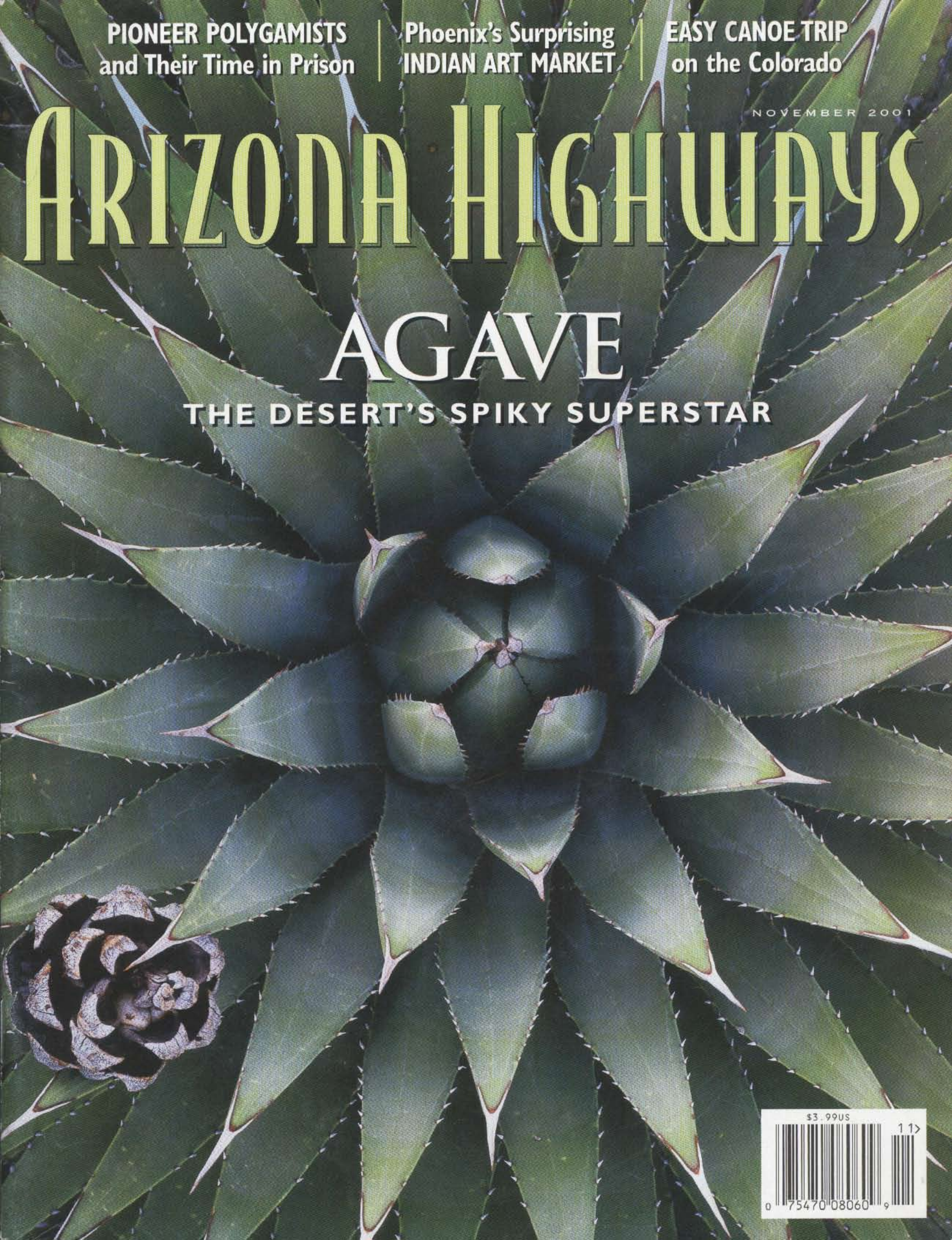
EASY CANOE TRIP
on the Colorado

NOVEMBER 2001

ARIZONA HIGHWAYS

AGAVE

THE DESERT'S SPIKY SUPERSTAR



\$3.99US



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12 COVER Amazing Agaves

The most useful of desert plants, the tenacious century plant helped ancient peoples survive.

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The Ahakhav Tribal Preserve takes the work out of a lower Colorado paddle trip.

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Collectors swarm the annual fine arts show in Phoenix.

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Thomas Gates, once the warden of Yuma Territorial Prison, also discovered the most beautiful sunset spot in the state — Gates Pass.

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Colorful fall leaves decorate narrow canyons and waterways.

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A Territorial prison inmate recorded his hardships and privileges.

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Colorful Tombstone feels like a circus during Emmett Kelly Jr. Days.



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Enjoy the state's largest Christmas parade; delight in the magic of luminarias, a Southwestern tradition; and visit one of the top birding spots in the country.

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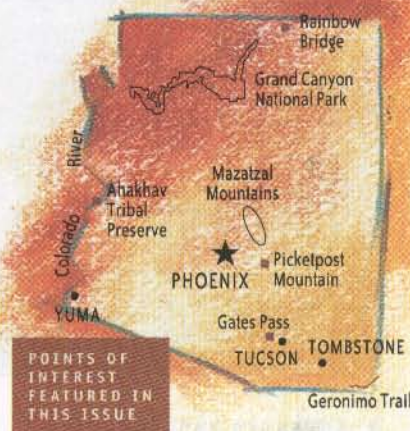
Fulfilling a lifelong dream to hike to Rainbow Bridge requires youthful determination and a little help from friends.

50 BACK ROAD ADVENTURE

Hostile grasshoppers prove the only threat these days along the Geronimo Trail.

56 HIKE OF THE MONTH


The flat top of Picketpost Mountain affords hikers surprising desert views.



A full-page photograph of a sunset over a calm body of water. The sun is a bright, glowing orb on the horizon, partially obscured by dark, silhouetted mountains. The sky is a deep orange-red. The water's surface is dark, with a shimmering, golden reflection of the sun extending from the horizon towards the foreground. In the middle ground, two people are in a long, narrow canoe, their figures silhouetted against the water. They appear to be rowing or paddling. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

At the Ahakhav Tribal Preserve, the Rowing Is Easy

CANOEING THE COLORADO

The background of the page is a photograph of a sunset or sunrise. The sky is a deep, warm orange-red. In the distance, a range of dark, silhouetted mountains stretches across the horizon. The foreground is a body of water, its surface reflecting the colors of the sky and the dark shapes of the mountains. The water has a fine, rippled texture.

TEXT BY SAM NEGRI

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RANDY PRENTICE

The mountains had gone from pink to purple before the night erased them. The darkness swallowed everything in the wild lands around us, including our canoes, which we had dragged from the glassy water of the lower Colorado River in the late afternoon. A small fire glowed on the narrow beach south of Parker on the state's western "coast," where we camped. All we could see was the light from the fire, along with an infinite number of specks in the galaxy overhead. A voice at one side of the fire said, "Huluna, did you have a story to tell us?"

The voice belonged to Fred Phillips, then an employee of the Colorado



River Indian Reservation. Phillips designed the 1,042-acre nature preserve, where we had started our canoe adventure, and served as the project administrator.

Huluna Reyes replied from a dome tent barely visible 20 feet

[PRECEDING PANEL, PAGES 38 AND 39] As the golden sun sinks behind the Riverside Mountains, Keith Clow and Fred Phillips guide their canoe along the Colorado River south of Parker.

[RIGHT] Twelve-year-old Brett Brimmer paddles while his dad, Michael, steers the Colorado Adventures canoe.

[BELOW] A backwater's calm surface mirrors the graceful lines of a great egret at the Ahakhav Tribal Preserve.

[OPPOSITE PAGE] Electrical power and water reservoirs from dams such as Parker benefit communities downriver, but change the natural balance of life along the Colorado.



from the fire. Reyes, a 20-year-old Chemehuevi Indian, managed the preserve's field staff.

"Yes, it's a story I heard the other day," he said, crawling from his tent. The Chemehuevi and Mohave Indians, indigenous to the area where we camped, make up the bulk of the population on the reservation.

"Is this a Chemehuevi story?" I asked.

"No," he said. "It's just a story I heard from another Indian, but I don't know what kind of an Indian he was." Reyes' story went like this:

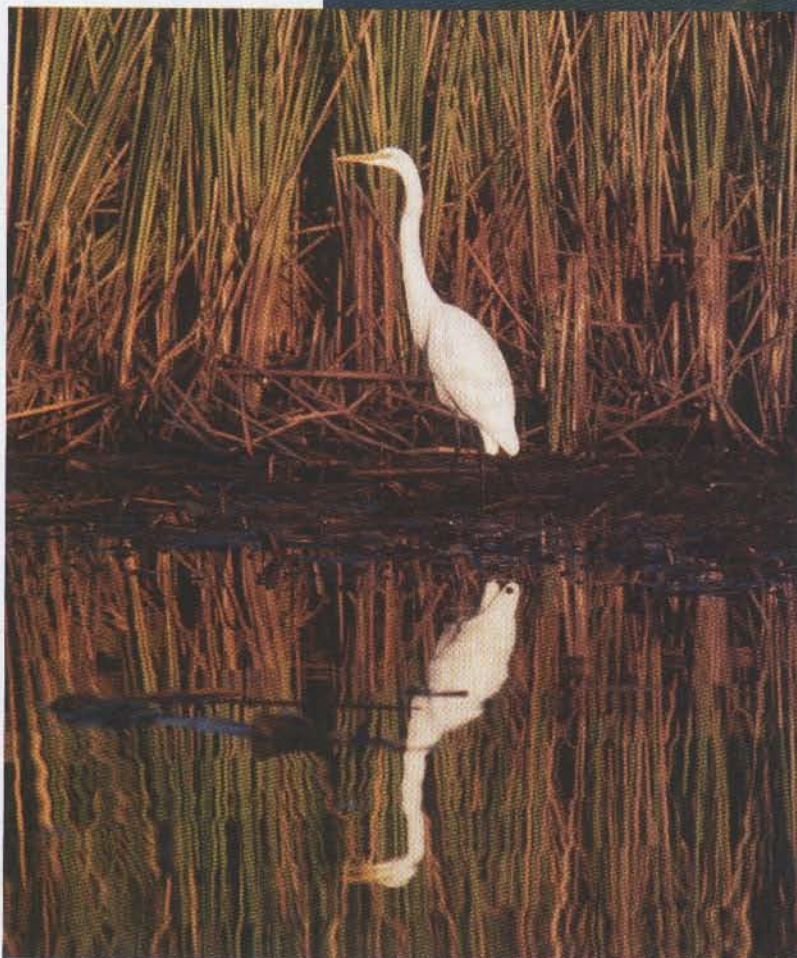
"There was a time when the Indian people were bad to each other, bickering all the time. So Grandfather Creator punished them by taking away the light. The people sent messengers to plead with him for the return of the light. They sent a hawk but Grandfather Creator just sat there wrapped in his buffalo robes, practically asleep, and did not even bother to look up. They sent

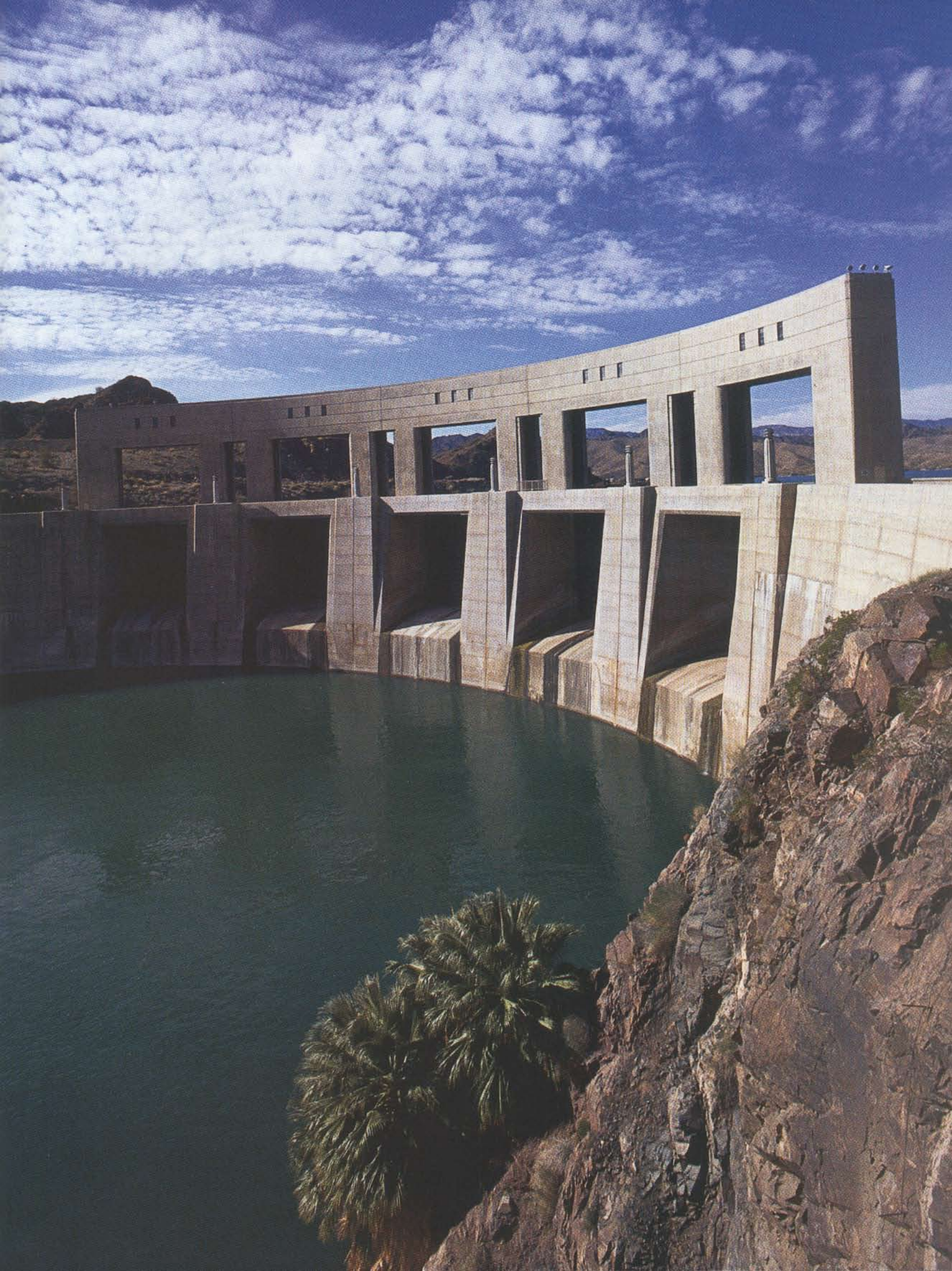
an eagle and the same thing happened. Then they sent some hummingbirds with the eagle. The Creator kept his head buried in his robes, not listening. Then the hummingbirds began to peck at the robes — peck, peck, peck, peck — all over his buffalo robes to get his attention. Finally, he looked up and the eagle repeated the people's plea and asked what they needed to do to get the light back. Then the Creator said, 'They know what they need to do,' and that is all he would say.

"So, the eagle went back, told the people what Grandfather Creator had said, and they quit their fighting. The Creator gave them back the light, but he still kept a part of each day dark, like it is now. And when you look up at the sky on a night like this, you can see the holes the hummingbirds pecked in the Creator's robe."

Early promoters called this stretch of the river the American Nile, a bit of advertising fluff that may have had meaning to the one or two people in Arizona during the 1920s who had ever seen the Nile. The riverbank dwellers had no illusions about the relationship of this stream to the one in Egypt. The origin story of the Quechan, Mohave and Chemehuevi, the Yuman-speaking Indians native to the terrain that eventually became Arizona and California, says that the great Creator, Mastamho, drew the river from the Earth.

Mastamho put a stick in the ground and drew out the water and watched it flow south. Then he put a boat on the river and loaded Mohaves and other Indians into it. He made the boat lean this way and that to create flatlands for planting. Where the boat went straight, the river straightened. Where the boat turned, the river curved. Maybe this is a faux Nile by virtue of being







a river in a desert, but the nearest pyramid is a hotel in Las Vegas.

In mid-October, when the daytime temperature hovers at a balmy 80-plus degrees, I arrived at the preserve, the heart of Mastamho's world, along with friends from Tucson — Ben Winters, Michael Brimmer and his 12-year-old son, Brett.

After a brief tour of the grassy preserve headquarters and a look at part of a vegetation project — where a 3-mile hiking trail offers a variety of viewpoints — we drove to the backwater near Deer Island. The plan called for our little fleet to paddle from the backwater channel to the river and then go south about 10 miles to a beach where we'd camp for the night under that star-speckled buffalo robe, then continue about 5 to 10 miles on the second day.

I've done some canoeing but I'm not an expert. "Will we hit any rapids or tricky spots?" I asked. They said we would not.

Phillips told us, just before launch time, "The person in the front of the canoe is the power, the one in the rear is the rudder." Winters and I had a general understanding of what that meant. We tend to learn from our experiences.

An old joke comes to mind: "I can row a boat. Canoe?"

As soon as we hit the first canoe, we had a better grasp of what each of us was supposed to do, short of abandoning ship. Most of the time, Winters paddled for movement and I dipped my paddle into the water — this way or that — primarily to steer.

When we reached the river's main channel, the current picked up, but there were no rapids in this end of the river. The many dams upriver — Parker, Davis, Hoover, Glen Canyon — create the feeling that we were really canoeing in what amounts to a series of long, rectangular troughs. The river proved a shadow of its former self. Prior to 1909, when the first dam was built, the Colorado flooded every year or two

during the summer months, redrawing the shoreline. Its banks were so wide that the area now called the Ahakhav Tribal Preserve, as well as most of the Mohaves' vast agricultural empire, was completely under water. Once the river's flow was controlled by dams, much of the rich land that had been river bottom was converted to farmland and leased to major produce companies.

The shores of the Colorado today are sparsely covered with arrowweed and thick with tall reeds, where wild ducks, egrets and great blue herons live. As we headed south on the river, we saw in the distance the barren, adobe-colored mountains where desert mule deer and bighorn sheep abound. But, harsh as the dry landscape is — it seldom gets more than 4 inches of rainfall in a year, and temperatures can reach 128 degrees in the summer months — the one moderating influence remains the presence of the Colorado River.

The river heats to slightly more than 80 degrees in July. In October, it felt a nearly comfortable 60 degrees — cold as winter rain as far as I was concerned, but others in our little navy thought it a perfect temperature for swimming. Phillips took a dip and glided about on his back like an otter, his head just above the water. Winters joined him, and Brett got in up to his knees but changed his mind. *Smart boy*, I thought.

I slept well that first night, and woke up smelling breakfast cooking with the sun barely over the barren hills. Somewhere in the dense reeds to the north, I heard the loud trumpeting call of sandhill cranes. I crawled out and faced a sky that looked like molten silk and headed toward the smell of pancakes and coffee. This was something I understood, and I was impressed that someone managed to get all the gear and ingredients together to put such a fine meal on a deserted beach in the middle of nowhere. But that was



precisely the point, Phillips said. The Ahakhav Tribal Preserve wanted families to come and rent canoes and guides if needed, to spend an afternoon, a day or several days on the river, and everything would be provided — canoes, life jackets, camping gear, food.

As an added attraction, I thought as Winters and I pushed our canoe back into the river on the second day, *old Mastamho is not far off*. About 50 miles southeast of where we paddled, a person in a plane or on a tall ladder can see Mastamho as an intaglio, an image about 150 feet across scraped into the desert floor by ancestors of the Indians who inhabit the area today.

We'd been on this river 24 hours. We had started our canoe trip in a backwater, a channel extending like a finger off the main riverbed. Although I had spent time on the Colorado much farther north between

the Arizona-Utah border and Lake Mead, where the dramatic cliffs of Marble Canyon and the Grand Canyon tower along its shores, the southern end of the river proved a new experience. The dams had turned the lower Colorado into a series of placid rectangles, which children and families could navigate easily. Certainly Brett and other youngsters we met along the way had no trouble.

However, as Phillips pointed out, the river was peaceful because it was October and the middle of the week. There were no motorboats nearby to create noise and turbulence. In the summer months, visitors — especially those wanting to fish or bird-watch — would do better to stay in the preserve's backwater lakes, where motorized craft are prohibited.

In creating the tribal preserve, one of the reservation's goals was

to restore native vegetation that had been destroyed by ecological changes caused by several dams north and south of Parker. The dams, Phillips pointed out, had provided flood control and also channeled water to irrigation ditches, facilitating a vast agriculture empire to flourish on and off the reservation, but they also blocked the natural flow of silt and fish, and killed off most of the native plants.

The dense mesquite forests upon which earlier generations of Indians depended for everything from food to dye, and the abundant willow and cottonwood trees, died and were replaced by the exotic salt cedars, or tamarisks, as well as rip-rap levees and tules too thick to penetrate. Phillips and a team work to reverse this horticultural

catastrophe by bulldozing away the tamarisks, reclaiming backwater channels choked with tules and planting hundreds of mesquites and cottonwoods, all irrigated with water pumped from the river.

To finance this work, the tribe applied for and received numerous government and private grants, and started this tourism enterprise of offering canoe excursions on the river.

Throughout our time on the Colorado, our canoes often remained 100 feet apart, sometimes more, sometimes less. Hardened navigators we were not, yet the calm water gave us the solitude and independence to detect that while dams had changed the river, its soul remained intact. ■

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The Ahakhav Tribal Preserve sits off Mohave Road on the Colorado River Indian Reservation near Parker. Canoe rentals, with or without a guide, can be arranged through the preserve office by calling (928) 669-2664. Rentals include delivery and pickup at various points on the river, all equipment (such as life jackets, paddles, dry bags) and safety instruction.

Sam Negri of Tucson has spent many years exploring different parts of the Colorado River and visiting the Indians who live along its shores.

Randy Prentice of Tucson would like to repeat the canoe experience someday by paddling the Colorado River all the way to Yuma.

[LEFT] Cattails thrive in a dredged channel of the Colorado, which glistens beneath a sapphire sky.

[RIGHT] The Brimmers pack gear at their riverside camp preparing for another day on the river.

[BELOW] Shallow water entices Victor Jay "V.J." Cuadras and Robert Jaime to slosh around at the river's edge.

