

After its turbulent course through the canyons and gashes of the Colorado plateaus, the Dolores flows quietly into the Colorado at this junction, one of the most beautiful spots along the great River of the West. Photo taken from Agate Hill.

Rocks Where the Rivers Meet . . .

With a veteran rock collector and lost mine hunter as a guide, Harold Weight followed a winding dirt road that led to Agate Hill in eastern Utah—and there found a precipitous mountainside covered with broken jasper of varied and beautiful coloring. They also found a perfect vacation campsite for those who like to loaf and fish. The locale of this story is the fabulous desert wilderness of southeastern Utah—a region featured in many past issues of *Desert Magazine*.

By HAROLD WEIGHT
Photographs by the author

"**T**HAT ROCK comes from a pretty place," Bill Henneberger told us as we admired his pieces of bright jasper. "It is from Agate Hill in eastern Utah, where the Colorado and Dolores rivers come together. I collected it when I was down at Dewey bridge, repairing placer mining equipment."

We were looking over Bill's rocks at his home in Grand Junction, Colorado, and planning possible field trips. Agate Hill sounded promising and Bill assured us there was plenty of the jasper. It was gratifying to

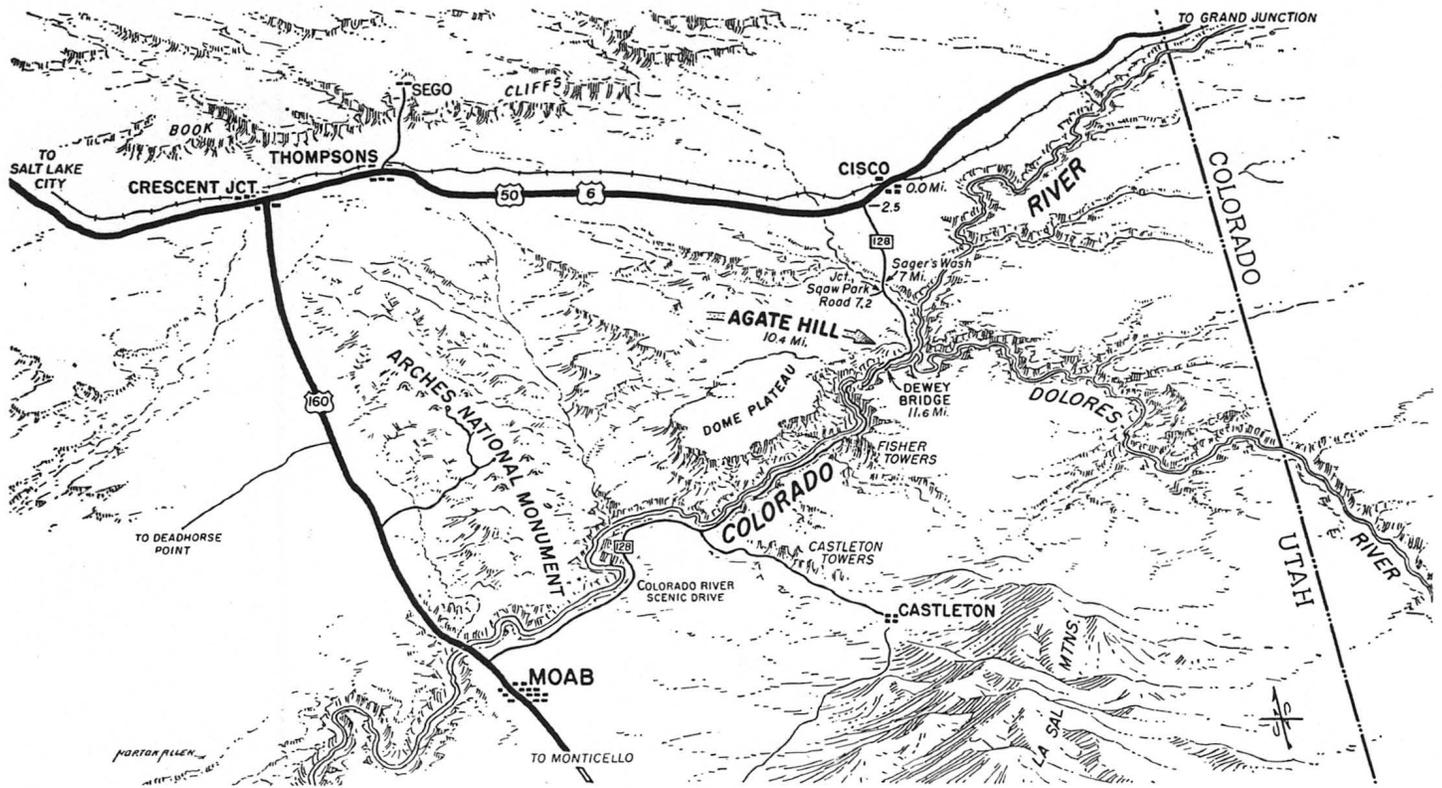
know a good dirt road, used daily by the Cisco-Moab mail carrier, passed the field—but it was also disillusioning to me. I had always pictured the junction of the Colorado and the Dolores as remote and inaccessible.

While we drove along Highway 6 and 50 toward the Utah border, Bill Henneberger, who has prospected and hunted rocks as a hobby since he came West in 1916, told us of his first visit to Agate Hill. His present work as a machinist, including repair of mining and milling equipment, sometimes takes him on business to places

where rockhounds could spend happy vacations.

A broken winch which had been used to haul a placer gold recovery machine through the river brought him to the junction of the Colorado and Dolores in 1944. From Bill's description, it must have been quite a gadget. A cable had been anchored on either side of the Colorado, and a generator and electromagnets were dragged back and forth on the floor of the river on it. The generator was in a "sort of submarine" with pipes sticking above the water. Apparently the machine depended upon setting up magnetic fields which would attract the black iron sands, then trap the fine gold and other minerals of great specific gravity in the iron held by the magnetic fields.

If that sounds complicated you should see some equipment for recovery of fine and flour gold. Everyone with an inventive turn of mind seems to have worked on the problem. In 1936 the *California Journal of Mining and Geology* estimated 7000 such devices had been patented. Some are simple, others unbelievably complex. Some work fairly well, some are worthless. The Colorado River sands have been the testing ground—and graveyard—for many.



While repairing the winch, Bill saw the colorful jasper and agate chunks around the old cabins where the miners lived, and learned where they had been found. He stopped to collect some on the way out.

He has another hobby. He is an avid lost mine and buried treasure fan and has collected all available information about many of these bright legends of the West. He has searched for several—including Southern California's Lost Pegleg—sometimes with the aid of his M-Scope.

"There's a railroad station called Sagers up ahead, about five miles west of Cisco," he said. "Once a Japanese cook worked there and according to the story he had a lot of money, all in silver coin. When he was alone, two Mexican workers tried to force him to give up his money. They killed him when he refused, but they didn't find his coin, and neither has anyone else. Folks think he must have buried it near by. But I went over every likely place with my detector and didn't get an indication."

I've been interested in these locators since the war when I operated a similar but more sensitive airborne device designed to spot submerged submarines. I had never seen one of the little metal detectors in actual service, so I questioned Bill regarding their usefulness.

He grinned. "It certainly detects metal. About 44 years ago there was a train robbery near Grand Valley. A chest of gold coin was carried off by the robbers, lashed between the

saddle horn of two horses. They carried it across the Colorado River, and are supposed to have buried it by three big cottonwoods about 200 yards below the present bridge. I didn't find any gold coin when I tried my detector there, but I did locate stove plates, truck wheels and a lot of other scrap. Even the black iron sand in the river bars gave me strong indications!"

Our last chance to check gas, oil and supplies was at Cisco, Utah, about 55 miles from Grand Junction. Zeroing our speedometer there, we continued on the main highway west for 2.5 miles, then turned south on State Highway 128. This is the Colorado

River road, reaching the river north of the Dolores and following it to Moab along red cliffs and through green bottom-land.

Utah State Guide lists 128 as: "Not recommended for squeamish drivers or timid passengers, impassable in winter and during spring floods." The road has been improved since that was written, but wise motorists will check its condition at Moab or Cisco before attempting a through trip. However from the pavement to Dewey bridge it is an excellent desert road when dry.

"But if it rains," Bill warned, "it gets as slick as grease." He added, comfortingly, "If it doesn't rain enough to soak through you might get out in a couple of hours." Anyone who has slid purposelessly—and apparently in at least four directions at once—on a wet Utah clay road will need no additional warning.

The road made its first branch just across Sagers wash—posted "Dangerous in flood"—and 7.2 miles from Cisco. We kept left. This is in Utah's uranium boom country, and the right branch leads to Squaw Park mining district where carnotite and vanadium claims are being worked.

As we neared the Colorado, Bill pointed out the picturesque ruins of a log cabin under cottonwoods to the left. "Quintus Cato homesteaded there in 1908," he said. "He was the one who started the placer mining down by Dewey bridge. Philip McCarey owns that ranch now."

The Colorado river came in sight on our left and the road narrowed, wind-

DEWEY BRIDGE LOG

- 00.0 Cisco, Utah. Approx. 55 miles west of Grand Junction, Colorado and 236 miles east of Salt Lake City on U. S. 6 & 50. Follow U. S. 6 & 50 southwest to
- 02.5 Junction with Utah State 128, the Colorado River road. Turn left (south) on 128. Dirt road, slippery in wet weather.
- 07.0 Cross Sagers wash, "Dangerous in flood."
- 07.2 Road Y. Keep left. Right branch goes to Squaw Park mining district, uranium and vanadium.
- 08.0 Abandoned log cabin (left) marks old Cato homestead.
- 10.4 Agate Hill collecting area, right; junction of Colorado and Dolores rivers, left.
- 11.6 Dewey suspension bridge — Limit four tons. (Moab 35 miles.)



William C. Henneberger, who first collected Agate Hill cutting material in 1944 after repairing mining equipment on the river below, points to an outcropping of the yellow-red-purple jasper.

ing between the water and high red-dish cliffs. Tamarisk and arrowweed lined the stream edge and as we rounded a curve pheasants in the road scattered and took off in low whirring flight across the river. Driving the last twisting section before reaching Agate Hill, we were absorbed by the quiet beauty of the river and its canyon.

The occasional gravelly banks and small sand bars, the deep shadow of the shimmering green cottonwoods were so inviting we started planning a return trip when we could spend leisurely days here. We would hike up tributary canyons, fish in smooth flowing water, relax under trees or on sunny sand, and watch the wildlife that concentrates around water in the desert.

As we rounded a sharp bend, the canyon opened up and Bill said: "We're here! Look to the right. There's a bench mark at the back of that big boulder. Stop just beyond it and we'll climb that slope."

When Bill sets foot in a rock field, he soon disappears over the hill, leaving even seasoned rockhounds panting. He's also something of a mountain goat. So it was not too surprising that the "slope" was a precipitous mountainside where we looked up and up

at a series of striking formations.

Then we were scrambling up, over and around large boulders, apparently of limestone. Among them we found chunks and boulders of jasper matching that in Bill's collection. Red, yellow and purple was the predominate combination. The most distinctive patterns were yellow and purple with tendrils and feathers of Chinese red. The best specimens had all three colors in fine moss.

We were elated by the size of some pieces, but soon discovered that many of the bigger ones were fractured and that their centers often were not as good in color or texture as the smaller chunks. We continued to climb until we reached an overhang under which excavations apparently had been made. A good deal of the jasper had been removed here. Some of the ledge contained minute quartz crystals and calcite, and the quality did not seem as good as that below.

From our perch at the base of the overhang, Bill pointed to the valley below, where a cottonwood oasis sheltered weathered cabins. "That's the ranch where I stayed while fixing the winch. An old fellow named Parker lived there and operated the placer. It was originally homesteaded by Frank Hatch about 1900, and now it's owned

by Lester Taylor of Moab."

It seemed a perfect picture of frontier Utah—the old log cabins almost hidden under the cottonwoods, the green meadowland circled by towering reddish cliffs, the two rivers mingling smoothly into a great silver band at the cliff base. And over it all the crisp blue sky was alive with hurrying white clouds. Frank Hatch knew how to pick a homesite!

By the time we had sampled the jasper, the entire hillside was in shadow. We wanted to see and photograph the Dewey suspension bridge, so we drove on. Before we reached the slender span, Bill pointed out a gasoline power shovel across the river, recalling his second visit to the area a few months before.

A number of outfits have attempted to mine placer gold in this area. Quintus Cato is supposed to have been the first—in 1908—and also the most successful, having recovered \$10,000, most of it from one pocket. The latest is the Cisco Mining company, and they bought the power shovel from the S and M Supply company for which Bill works. The big shovel was hauled to the bridge on a low semi-trailer, but obviously couldn't be carried across. So it forded the Colorado under its own power, but broke a



The old Hatch homestead—log cabins under the cottonwoods—is a landmark for the collecting field, right foreground. Dewey bridge is to the right of the sandstone headland, center right. Many attempts to reclaim fine placer gold have been made along this stretch of the Colorado.

clutch shaft part way up the opposite bank. Bill made a new part for the shovel, brought it down and installed it, then drove the big machine out of the river.

Bill learned the machinist's trade in Pennsylvania when he was 17 and first came to Grand Junction to work in the Denver and Rio Grande Western shops. When they put him in the round house, he quit in disgust and picked apples until he earned his fare back East. Once there he missed Colorado so much that he rode a freight from Chicago to get back. Enlisting from Grand Junction, he served through World War I in the navy as aviation mechanic.

He is especially fond of his present job because of the variety it affords. He has gone high into the Colorado mountains in the winter snows to dismantle old mills at Silverton and Leadville, and into the Utah desert heat to work on balky compressors in the carnotite mines. But this does not furnish enough outdoor life for Bill. In the winters he loads an old pickup, equipped with metal cabin, bed and stove, and takes off for a rockhunting and fishing expedition in the southern deserts.

When we reached the Dewey bridge and saw the four-ton limit, we esti-

mated the truck's weight, our own and the load of rocks and camping equipment in the back. There seemed a fair margin of safety so we set the wheels on the single track. The bridge was a bit agitated by our passing, but didn't let us down.

This bridge is one of the two which cross the more than 400 miles of Colorado river separating what we call the Utah strip from the rest of the state. The other is at Moab. The Arizona strip, cut off by the Colorado river in the northwest corner of that state has been widely publicized. This southeastern corner of Utah, isolated by the same river, is just about as large and has a much greater population, including the towns of Blanding, Monticello and Moab.

There was little time to explore at Dewey and, having photographed the bridge, we turned back. It was nearly dark when we reached Agate Hill again, but I wanted to stop for a last look at the two rivers.

Only since 1921 has there been a junction of the Dolores and the Colorado. Before then, it was the Dolores and the Grand with the Colorado coming into existence where the Grand and the Green joined. The Grand, famous among early mountain men and explorers, was renamed the Colo-

rado by Congress and the states involved when stream measurements proved the Green to be tributary to it.

Probably mountain men camped and trapped beaver at this spot. But none of them—Bill Williams, Rubidoux, Fitzpatrick or the rest — left much more than a depleted beaver population to show where they had passed. The early westward travelers seemed to have missed the junction. Escalante and Dominguez, in 1776, crossed the Dolores miles above this point. Branches of the Old Spanish Trail, followed by New Mexican traders to California in the 1830s and 1840s, apparently forded the Colorado to the north and south. The later main routes of emigration were to the north.

The pioneer river adventurers favored the Green over this branch, and there is only one early trip on record down the Grand from Grand Junction through to the Green. That was made by F. C. Kendrick in 1889, when he surveyed for the railroad Frank M. Brown dreamed of constructing at river grade through the Grand Canyon to the Gulf. The Dolores resisted whitewater boatmen until 1948 when a trip from near its source to the junction was completed by Mr. and Mrs. Preston Walker of Grand Junction and

Otis and Margaret Marston of Berkeley. They used a cataract-type boat built by the late Norman Nevills and reported the Dolores more turbulent than the Snake or Colorado rivers.

As I watched from the slope of Agate Hill, dusk poured into the little valley and the rich black shadows of the cliffs were heavy on the bottom lands. The old log cabins vanished under the cottonwoods. The thread of road, last evidence of human workings, became indistinct. Across the valley the waters of the Dolores poured silently from the still wild, still mysterious plateaus and mountains to mingle with the Colorado in a shining silver Y.

In that last light the junction of the two rivers became as lonely and remote from the present-day world as I had first imagined it would be. Alien to man, yet neither friendly nor unfriendly. Disturbing yet peaceful. At the very edge of space and outside the fetters of time.

I said something about it to Bill as we drove back toward the paving. About the untamed, unknown country that here lay close to the towns and just beyond the roads. He took me up enthusiastically.

"Unknown is right! We've got a lost mine within a dozen miles of Grand Junction, the biggest city in this part of the country."

It's the Lost Pin Gold mine, and the

story seems to have started about 1924 with an old prospector who brought placer gold in little pin-shaped pieces into Grand Junction and sold it to a jeweler. When he died, efforts were made to find the source of his gold. They knew he had ridden out with a man cutting posts in the cedar breaks. This man took him up the south side of the Gunnison River past the Black Rock dam. Beyond that point they could not trace him.

Then in 1945 two men left Grand Junction, crossed the Gunnison river bridge and turned left up the river. They entered one of the many canyons there and hiked until sundown when they made camp. While looking for wood one of them noticed little metallic bits on a flat surface of rocks. They were tenderfeet, but it looked like gold so they picked up what they could find before dark.

The next day they returned to Grand Junction where a prospector named Smith identified their find as gold. The two men went on to California, but one of them returned in 1947 to relocate the gold. He was unsuccessful.

On his first hunt for the pin gold, Bill Henneberger found nothing. He tried again Labor Day 1949. With Charlie White he went up the big canyon east of one called No Thoroughfare. There are four main branches in this canyon and about a mile up one of them Bill and Charlie

found water trickling between deep holes worn in the solid rock.

"I'd forgotten to bring a canteen," Bill explained, "and we had to have water or turn back. I told Charlie, 'Let's try this. If it was bad water, those frogs and tadpoles wouldn't be in it.' So we drank it and it sure tasted good."

They continued and about two miles up the branch found an old campsite on the edge of the wash. "Grass and shrubs had grown up in the wood ashes where the fire had been. And I found a cache with a shovel, axe, skillets, pans and tin cans. The bottoms were rusted out of pans and skillets and the axe and shovel handles were rotted. I took samples in likely places in the canyon, but never panned a color. But I put a new handle in the axe, and I'm using it today.

"That's all I've gotten out of the Lost Pin Gold mine so far. But I'm certain that was the old prospector's camp. I'm going back again, and next time I think I'll find it."

We hope Bill does find his Lost Pin Gold. But we doubt if he'll be really disappointed if he doesn't, because we think Bill is one of those people who like to be out in the desert wilderness, whatever the excuse. Who agree with that ancient chronicler of the Coronado expedition who said, in effect, that even if they hadn't found gold, they'd found a wonderful place to look for it.

Dewey suspension bridge—one of only two bridges which cross more than 400 miles of the Colorado River and tie the colorful and fairly populous "Utah Strip," the southeast corner of the state, to the rest of Utah. Present placer mining operations are being carried on just beyond the bridge and to the right.

