

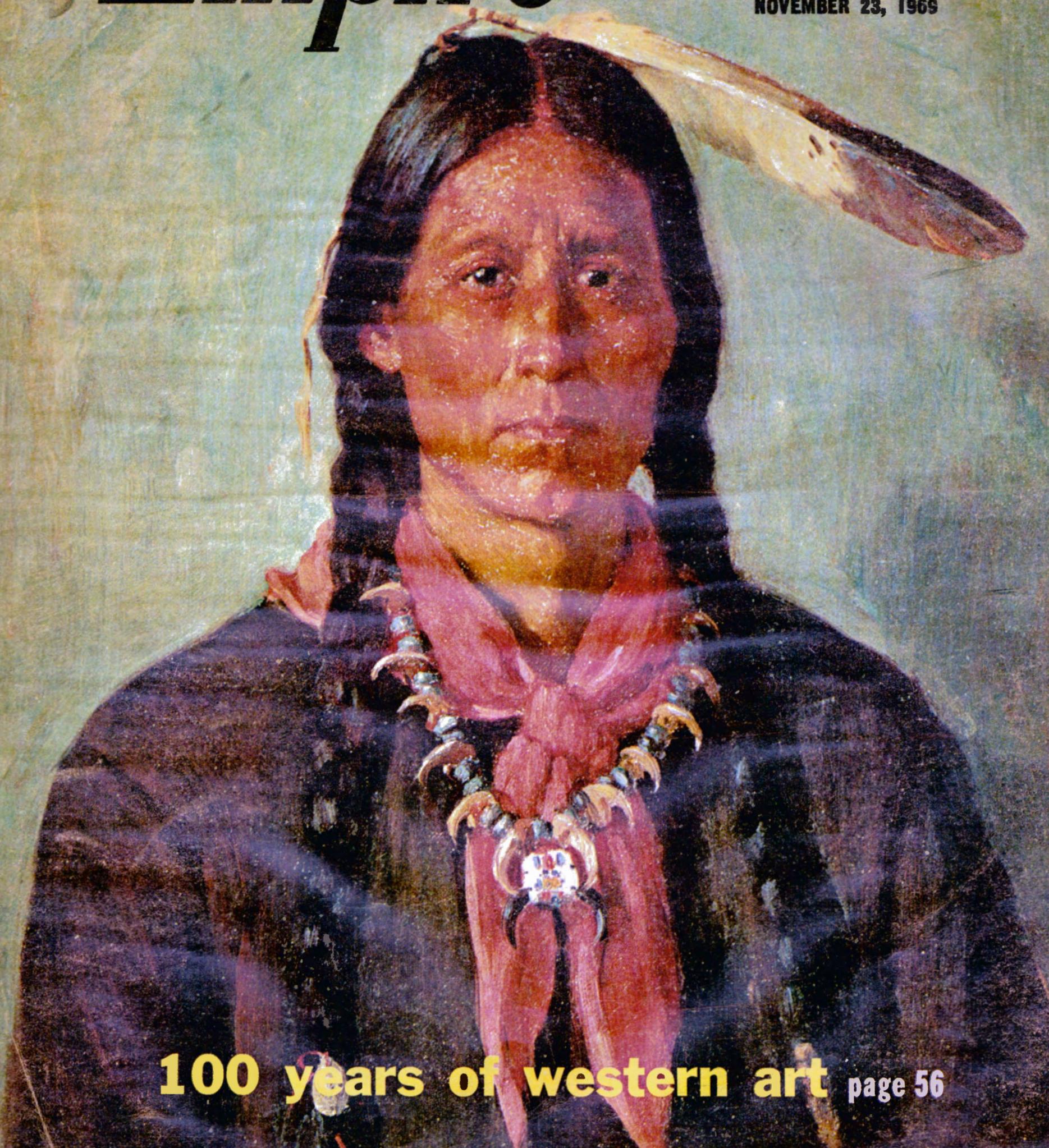
Sunday

# Empire

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**100 years of western art** page 56



Most of the cooking on the reservation is done over open fires outside the homes. This woman is preparing tortillas.

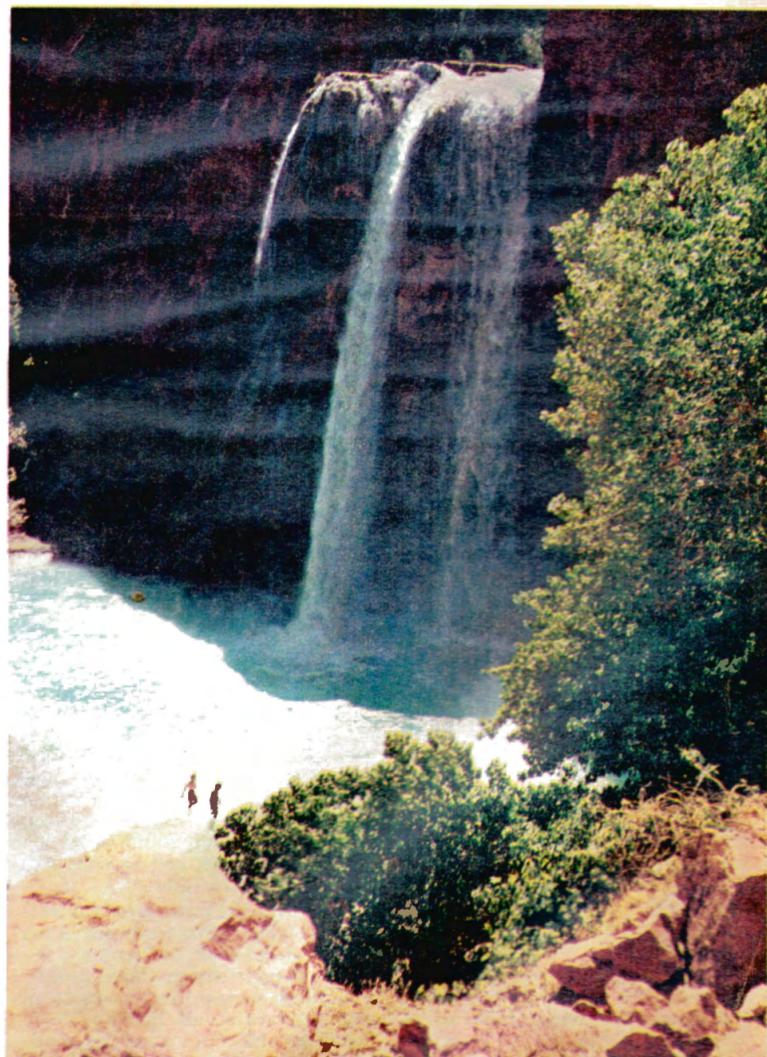
Photography by Alexander G. Zaphiris



Spectacular scenery abounds in the land of the Havasupais, located in the northwest portion of the Grand Canyon in Arizona.



Most of the tourists who visit the area find it peaceful and enjoyable. But there's a more realistic side to the paradise.



Out of the canyon valley from Havasu Creek waters descend mightily in huge, magnificent waterfalls. This is one of three in the area.

# Misery in Shangri-la

By JOHN BUCHANAN

*'Never have I seen poverty to match that of the Havasupai'*

FOR centuries the Blue Water People—the Havasupai—have lived in a canyon-bottom paradise of superlative natural beauty. Near-vertical red rock walls provide them with an isolation like the mythical Shangri-la. The turquoise waters of Havasu Creek cascade through the canyon valley, plunging noisily into spectacular waterfalls.

The soil is fertile, the summer hot and the winter mild, a combination that speeds the growth of fruits and vegetables. The picture is idyllic except for one thing: The Havasupai live in unbelievable misery—hungry, poverty-stricken, beset by numerous diseases, and virtually without hope.

A year ago last summer Alexander G. Zaphiris, a professor in the University of Denver's Graduate School of Social Work, went to live with the Havasupai. He was there on a \$4,900 grant from the U. S. Bureau of Indian Affairs to report on socio-economic aspects of the tribe.

What Zaphiris discovered shocked and depressed him. Living with the Indians, he was stricken with the same diseases that afflicted his hosts. He found anger and apathy, distrust and resentment. But gradually he won the confidence of the Indians. More important, he was able to write a report that at long last is bringing help to these forgotten Americans.

The home of the Havasupai is a square mile in the northwest portion of the Grand Canyon in Arizona, along the banks of Havasu Creek a half dozen miles from where it joins the canyon-gouging Colorado River.

The geography, the customs, the lore, the old soil and the dust of generations of ancestors wrap this small band of Indians in a cocoon-like eternalism. Most visitors who spend only a few hours there see the life of the Havasupais as easy-going, quiet, quaint. Zaphiris saw a more realistic side of the Havasupai paradise.

"I have studied social conditions in my native Greece, in Italy, France and England," Zaphiris says, "and never—even in the most poverty-stricken sections of those countries—have I ever seen poverty to match that of the Havasupai. I found, in their village of

about 240 people, 17 or 18 different diseases. Their diet is poor; their hygiene almost non-existent."

A pamphlet, encouraging the Grand Canyon National Park visitor to take the side trip to the Havasupai village, describes the people there as "good-humored."

"I found them very angry," Zaphiris says. "On the surface they might appear to be easy-going—almost lethargic. But underneath, they are resentful of the hardships they suffer."

Only later in his stay did he discover them to be "very warm people."

To visit the reservation one must turn off U. S. 66 seven miles east of Peach Springs (in northwest Arizona about 50 miles east of Kingman) and travel over 62 miles of dirt road, pointing lonesomely to the northeast out across desert plateau, to Walapai Hilltop.

The hilltop is the nearest one can get to Havasupai Village by car. This stopping point is a remote 40 airline miles west of Grand Canyon National Park visitors' headquarters on the canyon's south rim. From that point, the visitor must either hike or ride horseback down a frighteningly steep and narrow trail—a 2½-hour downhill drop of more than 2,500 feet. (The trail-wise Havasupais make the downhill journey in two hours. It takes a horseback rider 3½ hours to make the trip back up.)

In a sense, Zaphiris visited Havasupai Village for the first time as a tourist—for two days in April, 1968—to scout it and determine if he wished to take on the survey. Although the hasty visit did not tell him much, he decided to accept the job.

In June he spent a week examining welfare department records of the Havasupais in Kingman and Phoenix. In Phoenix and Fort Apache he met Havasupai children who attend boarding schools there nine months of the year. (Younger children attend pre-school, first and second grade classes in the village.)

On July 1, Zaphiris stood on Walapai Hilltop and once more, like a typical tourist, hired a guide and horse to take him to the village. This service, provided by members of the tribe, is one of their few

sources of earned cash. A visitor is charged \$1 to hike the trail, \$10 one way or \$18 round trip for a horse or mule.

Visitors can make arrangements in advance for pack animals and lodging (\$5 to \$6 per night) by writing Havasupai Tourist Information (for lodging) or Havasupai Tourist Enterprise (for pack animals), Supai, Ariz., 86435. During the height of the tourist season, Easter Sunday through Labor Day, animals are frequently available at Hilltop, or visitors can telephone the village for them.

Once again, Zaphiris found the three-mile ride down the trail unnerving. But finally he got to the village and located what he would call home for the next five weeks—a unit in one of the lodges built for tourists. His was in a new lodge, which provides four rooms, with a common kitchen. Half a dozen rooms are available in an older lodge and National Park Service camping facilities are provided near one of the waterfalls a short distance from the village.

Zaphiris found the Havasupais hospitable until they learned that Zaphiris was there to study them. One of them told Zaphiris later: "We've been studied so many times before, and yet nothing really happens that would help us."

The tribe is not without some help from the outside, but the help is not enough. About half of the adults receive welfare payments. Dental and health care is sporadic. A physician and a nurse from the U. S. Public Health Service visit the tribe once a month. There also is a non-denominational mission church in the village.

Since the adults seemed reticent to talk, Zaphiris turned to the children. A few remembered meeting him in Phoenix. Some invited him to participate in their favorite summer activity—swimming in Havasu Creek.

The Havasupai revere the beauty of their Shangri-la and of the blue waters of Havasu Creek, but children and adults usually go swimming in whatever clothes they are wearing. These same clothes are also washed in the stream. Many of the outhouses are located

near the creek, which adds to the pollution problem.

As a result, Zaphiris says, there is an extremely high rate of diarrhea all summer long.

Poor sanitation and poor nutrition lead to a very high incidence of disease. Diarrhea and respiratory illness are more frequent.

Other major health problems include diabetes, blindness and gall bladder disease.

Zaphiris was stricken with a 10-day siege of diarrhea as soon as he began living at the village. His misery was intense. The temperature rarely got below 100 degrees even at night, and rose to 115 degrees or more during the daytime every day during the first three weeks he was there. The box like canyon held heat like an oven. There were no refrigeration facilities, and the drinking water, obtained from a community well, became hot. Zaphiris boiled it before drinking it.

"Add these problems to the fact that no one seemed to want me there and you'll understand why, at the end of the first week, I was about ready to break my contract," Zaphiris says. "But I'm a stubborn Greek. By the end of the first three weeks, I had visited almost every family in the village."

"Finally, some of them began to warm up to me. They called me 'Alex of the Greek tribe,' noting that my dark complexion was somewhat different from that of many of the tourists."

In interviewing the villagers in 13 broad socio economic areas, Zaphiris found he could not begin asking questions immediately. Often he would visit a family about the time they would be eating in order to find all members present, sitting patiently in silence before finally beginning a conversation.

Occasionally he found the Indians hostile.

"And why not?" Zaphiris says. "There had been too many unkept promises before. Why should they answer my questions? Had it helped them to do so before? Above all, I found resentment and discouragement."

Most of the villagers live in one-room wooden shacks with dirt floors and smoke-blackened walls. The adults may enjoy the luxury of a

## Now, at long last, came a stranger who could do something

### SHANGRI-LA *continued*

mattress thrown into a corner of the room. Children sleep on the floor, perhaps on a pile of old clothes. If the room is lighted at all, it is with a kerosene lamp. Homes are often invaded by mosquitoes, red ants, spiders, scorpions and even snakes.

The Havasupais are constantly at battle with the elements—the heat of summer, the cold of winter. They seldom get enough to eat.

They grow some crops—potatoes, corn, pinto and navy beans. Fruit trees (primarily peach and apricot) thrive, but the people are so hungry they eat the fruit green, not being able to wait until it's ripened. Their bodies crave the fresh fruit, but in large quantities it aggravates their problems with diarrhea.

Most of the cooking is done over open fires outside the homes. Most of the families have two cooking pots—one filled with beans, the other with potatoes. Sometimes they make tortillas. Of 46 families, only three had kerosene stoves to cook on inside their homes, Zaphiris says.

They can purchase food at the trading post operated by the tribe. It is shipped in from Peach Springs and brought by pack animals to the village.

"Much of it is spoiled by the time it arrives," Zaphiris says. "The meat is of a fatty, inferior grade at best. Eggs often have to be thrown away by the time they get there. Some canned food is available at twice the price charged elsewhere. I paid \$1.19 for a can of corn beef that would sell for 69 cents here in Denver."

Zaphiris was allotted \$10 a day to buy food for himself. Much of the time he bought food for the people of the village and ate with them. "They were so hungry they were anxious to get any kind of food," he says.

Fresh fruit was available only twice during the summer at the trading post. So slim was the fare that Zaphiris lost 18 pounds in the five weeks he was at Havasupai Village.

Average income of a Havasupai family is \$60 to \$70 a month, and a large portion of this comes from welfare funds. Only scrappy wood is available for fuel in the canyon and it is too expensive to bring it in. Clothing is of the cheapest kind—shirts, jeans and flimsy cotton dresses.

Soap is a luxury. However, the Havasupai wash their bodies and their luxuriant black hair with soapweed. Mineral salts, and calcium in the water have built up natural "bathtub" basins along the stream.

"They are as clean as living conditions will permit them to be," Zaphiris says. "I cannot recall no-



The hogans are used mostly for sleeping. Poor sanitation leads to several major health problems.

ting a single one of them that had a body odor."

They cannot afford the refrigerated soft drinks at the trading post. Tourists buy those and scatter the cans and bottles along the trails to the waterfalls. Moonie Falls is 2½ miles downstream from the village, Havasu 2 miles and Navajo one mile.

The natives try to keep some chickens to eat and to provide an egg supply, but most of them are killed by foxes before the people can utilize them.

"I believe there are more dogs there than people," Zaphiris says. "They are pitiful creatures, almost dead from starvation. Yet the people are too kind to think of killing them. It is not nice to talk about, but the dogs are so starved that they are often seen eating human excrement."

Zaphiris said it was sometimes difficult for him to decide whether to give a ration of canned food to human beings or to some starved dog begging for food.

"The Havasupai love their children," Zaphiris says, and they feel very depressed that they have to suffer as they do. It is a completely disturbed family life, too, with the children away from the family three-fourths of the year, attending boarding schools in Phoenix or Fort Apache."

They follow a rather strict moral code. The tribe is divided into several very large family groups, and they do not believe in marriages between people who are so closely related as first cousins.

"When there are illegitimate births the tribe condemns the mother but accepts the child. If the mother remains single she usually keeps the child. If the mother finally marries, the child will usually live with the grandparents. Total population of the tribe remains about the same from year to year.

"The village has a population of 98 adults and, when I was there, 141 children. Ten of these children were of illegitimate birth of whom six were living with their mothers."

Although the tribe is a very old one (it has been in its square mile of "paradise" since about 1200 A.D.) its culture—its traditions, lore, ceremonies, arts and crafts—has not developed as in the larger Indian tribes.

Most of the adults have few skills. A few of the women do a little basketweaving and beadwork. A few traditional dances are performed at an annual Peach Festival at the end of August. Zaphiris describes their music as "monotonous."

By and large, they are not interested in religious services, but they enjoy recreational activities provided by the missionary church—piano music and occasionally some moving pictures.

Two of the adults living in the village have carried their education beyond the high school level. Most have gone no further than the fifth or sixth grades. The tribe is governed by a tribal council of five family group leaders. The council employs a member of the tribe to run the trading post.



George Crouter

*Many of Prof. Alexander G. Zaphiris' recommendations to the Bureau of Indian Affairs have been put into effect.*

## SHANGRI-LA *continued*

Income from the trading post and from rental of tourist accommodations is kept in an emergency fund to use in the event of serious illness or injury. On some of these occasions, the tribe will pay \$200 to bring a helicopter and fly the person out for medical care.

For a people with so many needs, what steps could an outside world take to help them?

"It's so difficult to know where to begin," Zaphiris says. "The tribe relies almost entirely on tourists for cash other than welfare payments. Many tourists go no farther than the hilltop, and some of the Havasupai think it would be wise to have tourist accommodations there, perhaps along with a dining and merchandising pavilion.

"They also need to improve their own shelters considerably. Rather than a monthly visit from a public health service physician and nurse, there should be a registered nurse on duty there at all times.

"And how can a people so beset by illness have the courage and vigor to help themselves? I think we could help them by such a simple thing as providing the village with two washing machines. If they had washing machines, they would no longer have to wash in Havasu Creek. And this step forward would, in itself, do a great lot in cutting down disease."

Early in August, 1968, Zaphiris completed his five-week stay with the Havasupais. He assembled his notes and interview sheets, gave away his most usable clothes to his friends and prepared to depart wearing a shirt, jeans and tennis shoes.

"Finally, I was ready to leave. Many cried and I cried too because I'm from an emotional Mediterranean people.

"My friend, Irv, a native, volunteered to accompany me up the trail. By this time, heavy black

clouds gathered. Suddenly there was a downpour. I had never heard thunder like that, bouncing around in the canyon. So much rain came down that the canyon walls were all turned into waterfalls.

"Everything was flooded, including most of the homes in the village. Irv told me it was impossible to get out. Three days later we tried it. The river was still dangerously high. We had to cross it three times, and I was more concerned about the safety of my briefcase full of research papers than I was for myself. It took us seven hours to get to the hilltop—twice as long as usual.

"I was wet and dirty. A few hours later I was in a jet plane headed for Denver. I noticed people looking at me, and then I remembered how I was dressed."

Zaphiris' return to civilization was made all the more meaningful by a reunion with his wife and three daughters, then 3, 5 and 6 years old. In the weeks that followed he compiled his notes in a report for the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The story has a happy ending. The report did not simply gather dust like so many others before it. A number of Zaphiris' recommendations have been put into effect. A work experience program has been set up in the reservation to prepare the Indians for outside employment. A social worker has been spending four to five days a month with the Havasupai trying to meet their needs. Welfare assistance has been authorized for several needy families. An additional classroom has been constructed, Public Health officials have been exploring sanitation projects, and five new houses have been constructed. But these are small beginnings. There is much yet to be done to bring the simple necessities of everyday life to the Indian Shangri-la. ■