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Canyon Wonderment: Travels of a Ranger Librarian

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As I stood marveling at what is arguably the world's most famous chasm, a fork of lightning briefly illuminated the dark Arizona sky. Goosebumps (or was it the electrified air?) sent a shiver of the present through me, a reminder that my temporary role as a "flat hat" librarian for the National Park Service was quite real. During the summer of 2010 I spent eight weeks in Grand Canyon National Park participating in their Teacher-Ranger-Teacher Program, or in my case, Librarian-Ranger-Librarian, as administered by GCNP Research Librarian, Betty Upchurch. Betty, a former school librarian herself, has designed the recurring position specifically for K–12 information specialists and educators. Using titles like *Snail Girl Brings Water: A Navajo Story*, by Geri Keams (1998), I crafted lesson plans, annotated bibliographies, and pathfinders in collaboration with the Environmental Education Department; philosopher John Dewey at my shoulder, "if knowledge comes from the impressions made upon us by natural objects, it is impossible to procure knowledge without the use of objects which impress the mind." The collective jaw-dropping that occurs on the South Rim each day serves as evidence that people are being impressed.

Storytime Adventure, a ranger-led program on the lawn of the El Tovar Hotel was undoubtedly the most revelatory part of the two months. Through Socratic dialogue we discovered truths about the landscape and ourselves. While investigating some elk scat with a kid from Greece and a kid from Scottsdale I was struck by how libraries near and far are place magnets for local culture and natural objects, a wonderment of special collections defined by demographics and environment. We would do well to embrace the "Grand Canyon" in our home collections—at Valley that would be nuns, prayers, and SATs—becoming experts on how to acquire and borrow those tactile objects that will illuminate people, places, and ideas for our patrons.

I was lucky (or crazy) enough to do a Rim to Rim backpack in early July, which truly solidified the magic ... and danger of the canyon. Three people perished in the canyon on the weekend of my trek—an imperative to do your research if there ever was one. I took day hikes through the ponderosa, learned to avoid tourist traps, pondered the logic of Library of Congress cutter numbers, gazed at the Perseid shower, and did plenty of adult reading for myself, including a must for Oregonians visiting the desert, *Getting Over the Color Green: Contemporary environmental literature of the Southwest*, edited by Scott Slovic (2001).

Stationed in a quiet corner of the Park Headquarters courtyard I met people from Germany, Seychelles, and Chile. British tourists slipped in to escape the heat and post travel photos on Facebook, a French family relaxed after a day of hiking with a nature program in the AV room, and several Jamaican youth, employed by Xanterra in the capacity of food service and hotel launderers, solicited my assistance in making online travel plans. NPS employees, interns, and Grand Canyon Association members contacted the library daily in search of histories, environmental impact statements, and scholarly journal articles. With a collection of 12,000 items on the park itself and the larger intermountain region, I handled interlibrary loan requests from as close as Sedona and as unlikely as the Library at Disney's Animal Kingdom in Lake Buena Vista, Florida. Can't afford a trip to The Canyon this year? Request an ILL on the exploits of the Kolb Brothers, John Wesley Powell's epic voyage, or a biography of architect Mary Colter while you plot an exchange, sabbatical, or summer adventure of your own. 



GCNP Research Library
<http://tinyurl.com/6tw9ln>

NPS Teacher Ranger
Teacher Program
<http://tinyurl.com/66afabz>

More on the author's travels
<http://tinyurl.com/5toublk>

