

A Trip to the Supai Village By Conny Bogaard

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Hi, my name is Conny Bogaard and I'd like to share a story of an epic summer trip to the Grand Canyon a couple years ago. It was an unusual experience and I will explain why.

The reason for my trip was not vacation, or pleasure, as you might expect. I was to take a group of college students from Northern Arizona University on a field trip to Supai Village located at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. Supai Village is the center of the Havasupai Indian Reservation and home to one of the most remote living native American tribes in the United States. At around 200 people, the Havasupai is also one of the smallest living tribes in the U.S. Interestingly, Supai is the only place in the country where mail is still carried out by mules, or any other package for that matter.

Thanks to one of my students who was a tribal member, we were to visit as guests and camp out in the village which was really unusual. The official camp site which is operated by the Havasupai Tribal Council is outside the village and it requires a special permit to stay there. The campground is close to the Havasupai waterfalls, famous for their blue-green water. In fact, it is this water that gave the tribe its name: Havasupai means people of the blue-green waters. The spectacular waterfalls and isolated community within the Havasupai Indian Reservation attract thousands of visitors each year.

But tourism has taken a toll on the Havasupai and the environment. Each year, there are many more reservation requests than available campground spaces. The impact of visitors in the Canyon, the 2018 flood damage, the cost of maintaining trails and visitor services and, more recently, the impact of the COVID pandemic, have been overwhelming. This summer, all Havasupai tourism remains suspended until further notice. Looking back, I feel extremely privileged to have had the opportunity to stay there and be a guest on the Havasupai tribal land.

Now the Grand Canyon is one of those iconic places that initially leaves you with a feeling like you've walked onto a movie set—a western movie set, to be precise. And there's this other thing: it's mind-bogglingly huge. Not only is it a mile deep, but it's also 277-“river miles”-long and up to 18-miles-wide. It's also a bit of a challenge to get to, with only three spots where you can reasonably get into the Canyon: the North Rim, the South Rim, and the West Rim. Coming from Flagstaff, Arizona, our group planned on using the South Rim as our access point. But instead of hiking the 8-mile trail from Hualapai Hilltop down into the Canyon as most tourists do, we were to take a helicopter ride because the College wanted to eliminate the risk of students getting hurt. Needless to say, the helicopter ride was an adventure all in itself. Not so much for the Havasupai. Little did we know that traveling by helicopter was their daily fare. The helicopters were exclusively to serve tribal members and they knew how to make the best of it.

As we anxiously waited our turn, we saw anything from people, cows to building materials taking off and descending into the depths of the Canyon. Finally, after hours of waiting, it was our turn. The pilot took us in small groups of 2 so it took several trips to relocate everyone. The ride didn't take long, maybe 10 minutes, but it was one of the most breathtaking 10-minutes I've ever experienced. It is impossible to describe what I saw. Flying into the Grand Canyon reawakened my senses and left me with a new appreciation of the natural world. I noticed the immense scale of the Canyons, and the beauty of the layered bands of red rock that change with the everchanging light and color. It was a moment of transcendence, when you feel you're being transported into a different space and time. Most of all, it left

me with a sense of awe and wonder about creation as well as a deep respect for the native people who call this magic land their home.

This transcript of "A Trip to the Supai Village" is part of the Humanities Kansas Humanities Hotline, a series of bite-sized micropresentations about Kansas stories – both serious and light-hearted – that are researched and presented by experts across the state. Humanities Hotline topics change monthly. For more information about Humanities Kansas and the Humanities Hotline, visit humanitieskansas.org or call 1-888-416-2018.