

Navajoland, The Way It Was

Edna Fridley shares images from 1963 to 1968. It was a different time and a different world.

Words by Jim Stiles. Photos by Edna Fridley.

At first glance Edna Fridley didn't look much like an intrepid explorer who would wade hip deep in fast-moving river currents, or scale arduous cliffs just to get a better view. But that was Edna. She grew up in Ohio, but her husband, Charles, was an early day computer whiz and was transferred to a Hercules Aerospace facility in Brigham City, Utah, in the late 1950s. Both stayed

for the rest of their lives.

Charles later went to work for Morton-Thiokol, but from the time they arrived, Edna started exploring the wild and remote country of southeast Utah. She signed on with both Harry Aleson and Ken Sleight to float Glen Canyon. In fact, her last trip would be one of the last Glen Canyon river trips before the completion of the dam and the rising



The Cly family was one of the earliest guides for tourists who came to Monument Valley, long before the roads were paved. Among the most intrepid was Edna Fridley from northern Utah. She came to know the Cly's very well during her many trips. AT LEFT: Here one of the Cly family salutes Edna from a high ridge in Monument Valley in 1965. The Cly's also managed a herd of sheep which at that time was a major part of their economy. Eventually, due to overgrazing, the sheep herds were cut back drastically, though many Navajos objected to the reductions and suffered financially as a result.



RIGHT: The Clys were brilliant weavers, praised for their workmanship. Navajo rugs were already a much sought-after treasure, even in the early 1960s. The price of a blanket then is a fraction of its value now. The formation to the rear is known as the Three Sisters. BELOW: Edna Fridley with her 50-pound pack on one of her many backpack trips. She was held in awe for her strength, stamina and enthusiasm by all who knew her. Already in her mid-50s, she was an amazing woman.



Betty Cly and family were great horsemen and often helped move sheep from one grazable area to the next. Sometimes Betty brought the little ones along as well.



Navajos move a herd of sheep including one very big, very intimidating fellow down the dunes in summer 1963.



LEFT: Willie Cly in 1965. RIGHT: Happy Cly, Willie's wife. BOTTOM: John Cly, one of the leaders of the Cly family. He and other members of his family were also the subjects of a documentary, "The Return of Navajo Boy." The 2000 film dealt with several decades' long issues that the Navajo fought with the federal government and corporations. Its misrepresentation by the media, its lack of a viable political voice, and especially its denial of reparations for environmental illnesses due to uranium mining in Monument Valley, Utah, were major topics of debate for

the Clys. The film was actually a sequel to a silent film called "The Navajo Boys" that also featured the Clys and was shot by the producer Bill Kennedy's father.



waters of Lake Powell.

Edna also had a fondness for the Navajo Nation and its inhabitants. Year after year she returned to Monument Valley and Canyon de Chelly to visit old friends she had made over the years. She rarely missed the Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial, held each year in Gallup, N.M., and came to know many riders in the All Indian Tribal Rodeo at Coal Mine Canyon in Arizona.

Her photographs, taken over a period of 20 years, are testament to her love of the Four Corners country and the friends she made along the way. ■

Jim Stiles is the founding publisher and editor of The Canyon Country Zephyr. After four decades as a resident of southeast Utah, he moved to a remote ranch and farm community on the High Plains of Kansas, where there are no tourists.



ABOVE: Last year, the 100th annual Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial was held in Gallup, N.M. According to its longtime sponsors, “Thousands of Native American and indigenous participants come together each year to share songs, powwow dances, and culture at Red Rock Park.” Along with the artistic display of heritage, the Ceremonial Queen Pageant, an all-open rodeo with junior and ladies competitions, and a film festival showcasing Native American and indigenous storytelling are part of the tradition.

Navajo herdsmen move sheep to water in 1963. The Mittens towers above them in Monument Valley.



The All Indian Rodeo was held at Coal Mine Canyon on the Navajo Reservation. This photo is from 1965. The tradition ended just a couple of years later. A version of the All Indian Rodeo is now held in Tucson but few feel it has the same spirit as the original.



Edna Fridley takes a much needed rest in Grand Gulch, Utah. She was a great admirer of the Navajo and Hopi and a frequent visitor to the ancient ruins of their ancestors.