

Aboard a "floating wheelbarrow"...

## Explorer Ives Seeks Water Route to West, Introduces World To 'Valueless' Canyon

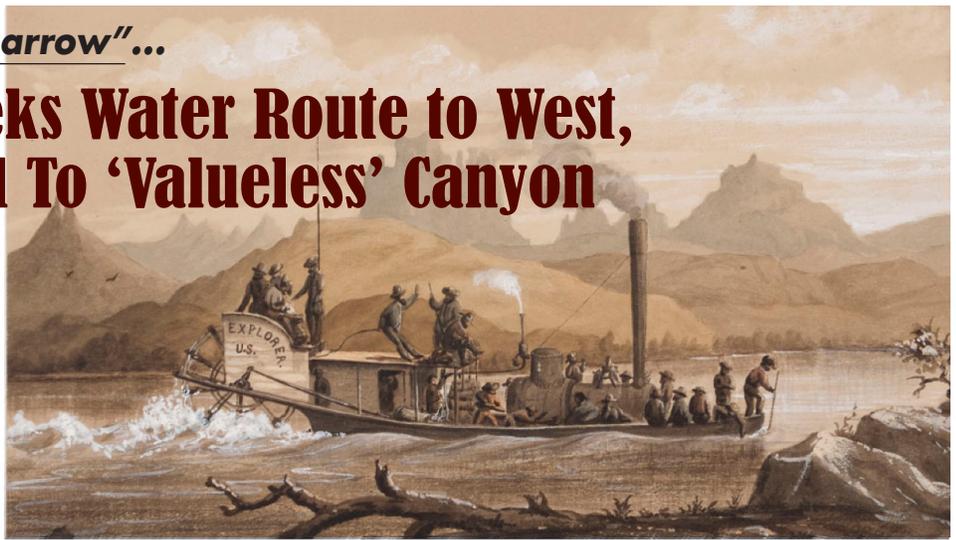
The land that would become Arizona was still part of the New Mexico Territory in 1857. For decades, mountain men and prospectors had crossed the landscape; Army surveyors had mapped it for possible wagon routes and railroad lines.

There was riverboat activity between Yuma and the Sea of Cortez along the Colorado River. Unknown, however, was the course and character of the landscape upriver from Yuma.

Lt. Joseph Ives was tasked to explore this waterway and given a free hand to decide how to proceed. His wisest decisions were in selecting specialists for the trip: John Newberry, a geologist; Frederick von Egloffstein, cartographer and artist; and Heinrich Möllhausen, illustrator.

More dubious was his choice of craft. Disdaining shallow-draft riverboats, Ives contracted for a new boat: the "Explorer," constructed in Philadelphia, disassembled and shipped to the Pacific Ocean and up the Sea of Cortez, where it was reassembled.

At 54-feet long with steel plates on the bottom, this stern-wheeler was weighed



H. Möllhausen illustration, 1858

The "Explorer" was a stern-wheeler commissioned by Lt. Joseph Ives for sailing up the Colorado River in 1858. With its steel plates and steam engine, it was described as a "floating wheelbarrow."

down even more with its wood-burning steam engine, supplies, equipment and a crew of 24. One critic suggested the craft had "the seaworthiness of a wheelbarrow."

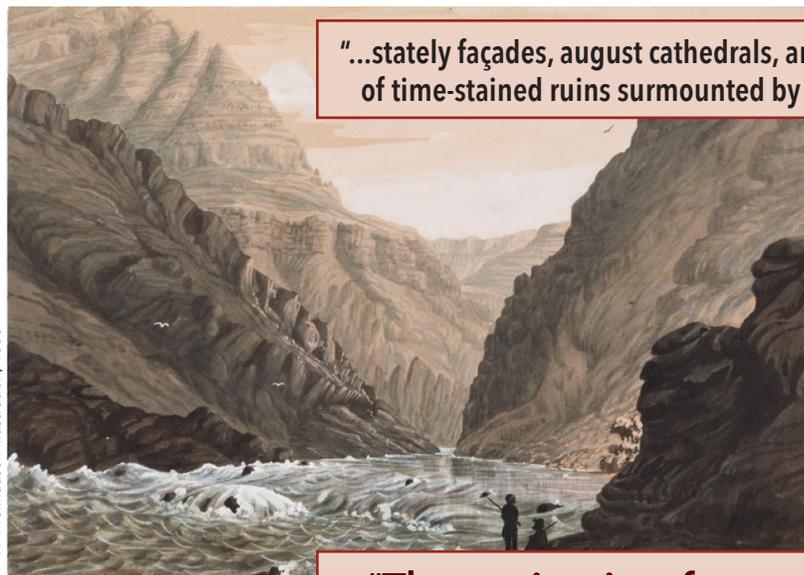
Churning upriver in January 1858, the "Explorer" passed the mouth of the Bill Williams River, which Ives had followed a few years earlier with Lt. Amiel Whipple. The crew made contact with largely unknown Indian tribes, who were friendly, curious and often helpful as guides.

Near present-day Needles, they passed where Capt. Lorenzo Sitgreaves came overland to the Colorado River, and where Lt.

Edward Beale and his camels had crossed a short time before. At a point not far from today's Hoover Dam, Ives sent the "Explorer" back to Yuma and the crew rowed a skiff further upriver to Las Vegas Wash.

It was the next part of the expedition that became most noteworthy. After several detours and backtracking, they went east overland looking for access points to the Colorado. Ives was able to follow Diamond Creek downstream from the high plateau. At river level, they were overwhelmed....

In his report, Ives wrote of what he saw in awestruck architectural language:



H. Möllhausen illustration, 1858

**"...stately façades, august cathedrals, amphitheatres, rotundas, castellated walls, and rows of time-stained ruins surmounted by every form of tower, minaret, dome and spire...."**

Lt. Joseph Ives and his crew were the first to map the Colorado and first white men to enter the Canyon at river level. The expedition had far-reaching consequences for the development of the Arizona Territory. Only a few years later, the River became a major highway for supplying the Territory's new capital in Prescott and other settlements in the region.

Ives' team of specialists had done their jobs well. Geologist Newberry revealed the fabled canyons of the Colorado to the scientific world of his time. Sketches and watercolors by Möllhausen captured the splendor of the scenery, and provided the most authentic documentation of largely unknown peoples. Von Egloffstein expressed the ruggedness of the country in his illustrations. Though it was a scientific paper, the report had all of the romantic imaginations of the human experience – going where no white man had ever gone before. Ives' official document was richly illustrated with maps, paintings and topographical sketches – even though he is often dismissed for writing:

**"The region is, of course, altogether valueless. . .  
"It can be approached only from the south, and after entering it there is nothing to do but leave. . . It seems intended by nature that the Colorado River, along the greater portion of its lonely and majestic way, shall be forever unvisited and undisturbed."**

Valueless" lies in what Ives didn't find: accessible, aerable land with natural resources to exploit. It was a region dreaded and shunned by the emigrant, miner and even the adventurous trapper.

It might have become "unvisited and undisturbed" except for one thing: it's exceptional, natural beauty. Today, more than six million visitors discover the wonder of the Grand Canyon every year.