



Once Lost, I Lithify:
An Archive of Experiencing
the Geology of the Colorado Plateau

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by McKenna Graf

***Dedicated to the Faculty, Staff and
Students in and around the Geology 160 Course:***

*We have traveled and we have discovered time as seen by the earth.
Time with you all has been as monumental as the places we've seen.*

Preface

This book includes a collection of poems (finished and unfinished) and pictures from the Lafayette College Geology National Parks Interim Trip in 2024. I went on this trip the summer after my sophomore year of college with the hopes of getting class credit and generating poetry. What I found? Something much more.

My background is filled with the arts as an English and Film & Media Studies double major. And I don't engage in much physical activity but I do enjoy a good view. Needless to say this trip was incredibly out of my comfort zone. Miles away from home, a science class, and hikes everyday. I was very unprepared going into this class in all senses of the word. But I held onto one fact. We would be traveling to Utah.

When my mom found out about this trip and that we would be stopping in Utah, she strongly encouraged me to start. In 2003 I was born in Utah and lived there for only a handful of years. I had not been back since. Until this trip.

Being able to travel to so many beautiful places and learn about what makes them so beautiful was an incredible experience in its own right. Getting to go back to where I was born and report back to my parents was strangely empowering. I feel like I spent a lot of this trip just settling. Shifting. Seeing. And by the end I knew I still needed to see more.

I see this book as an archive of my time in the National Parks and influenced by the Geology I learned. It includes pictures and poems that I have not touched since the trip ended. I felt that if I had heavily edited or wrote more after the trip it would no longer be about the Parks. And that's what it was meant to be. It's divided by the places we visited and in the order of the days I wrote the poems. I learn from the places around me, my mentors, my teachers, my peers—my friends. And this is the result of that.

You take an English major to the woods and I'll touch the trees and write a poem.

Sincerely,



McKenna Graf

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FIRST WE SUNK INTO SEDONA:

Oak Creek Canyon

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Deposited in Sedona

We sunk

into Sedona.

Students lithified

into sediment.

So sent we to the earth

to find where we

deposit deep.

We hide

(inside. We layer and

listen to her crack

and fault.

But on the other side

we fold.

It's cold,

we have become old.

Eros eroded

Eros eroded and

sunk into seduction.

And when we faulted,

*Did you choose
to become the river?*

Open the crack

and break
it apart.

*Make us weak or
find us weak?*

Discuss until we diverge.

Find me at the end

where you made it hurt.

When it was meant to be

just process. And I can't.

Live until a new layer forms

on top.

Like the
columnar
basalts,

you
are
the
space

betw
een

that I wish
to grow up from.

We
were
cracked.

We
were
offset.

We
were
at
fault.

Lay and lie

Between her legs
there was a fault.

Yours or hers is unknown.
Hands outstretched.

There came a river,
legs widened like a canyon.

And shrouded in green
dress her up.

Become unknown.
Become the lines.

That's where the story
lies. It's easy to hide.

Artist for the Ages

I don't know who wrote
the lines of time. I like to imagine
a path of paint
 dripping
 from
 the

rocks. There was an artist
on the Chinle looking at petrified wood. She sat
on a rock metamorphosing into sand.
But her hand remained

a sediment. Searching for time.
Tracing the lines. Capture the wood.
She will pass. But this will last.

I draw it in my book.
I put on sunscreen.
We move on.

Ouroboros

I am cut
by rivers.

Carved
like
canyons.

Layers (exposed

)

I make my faults your study.

You told me to breathe,
I turned red
from holding my breath.

You wonder how long it took
to fold myself into problems

you ignore. Dried up shores.
I can't remember what they were for.

Dig my memories up like fossils

The fish are false.

The leaves get left

behind in time.

Change what you look like—
but it still breathes the same.
And I am watched.

I lie and steam
and will never reveal to you
the dream you've designed around me.

I am not monumental mountain nor myth.

I am loose rocks

blown
by the
wind

trying to find a place to hide.

I interrupt my own layers.

I disrupt my own growth.

But this process is cyclical,

I go back to the earth.

Elegy of Erosion

When there is nothing I
am laid down.

Shuffling sediment sliding on top
of each other. I am built

until I break into silt from flows
of rivers rapid I rise.

Carved out through down cutting I
crack. Until I lack the in between.

Opening for you to explore.
Forgetting to give any explanation more.

The shore is gone I
carve myself out.

But still you pour down ponderings
and hypothetical hypotheses into my caverns.

I drown in dry discussions.
You watch from above. You walk.

Once lost, I lithify.
I become the layers of the earth.

TO REST WITH THE RIVER:
Colorado River in the Grand Canyon

Flowers

I saw a flower grow
out of rock and thought
of you. The grit it takes to
grow in this space.

You pace yourself.
As a seed you were thrown
into the unknown and told
to throw yourself upwards.

I saw a bird and thought
of you. Where do you go
when it's quiet inside?
Do you see my hand?

Stand alone to know you can.
But underneath it looks like sand.
It all feels the same to you.
Familiar. Not family.

I reach for you and you shrivel up.
I am patient and I pour
water gently. You turn towards me.
A flower more confidently grows.

You are Nature to Me

I sit on the river
and rapidly I conspire
with the current dying
to capture the waves and you—
The cold water splashing on me.

Look.

I call the lizard your name
and hear your laugh in the waves.
I see your smile in flowers
and map your soul
across states. I wait for you
to appear. I watch the stars.
I see them crash down.
They stick to my skin.
I feel you again.

Your skin feels like sand
that my hands pass through.
I hear your laugh in the waves
of the rapid. I fall into the layers
of the earth and you
grab at me like the water
against the sand. After seeing
the world unravel you take off
my skin and place your lips instead.

Me, now covered with moss, you kiss me again.
Flowers grow. Hearts unbreak.
I fall into you eroding down
to the place where you live.

Look again.

I fall deep.

I fall to my knees.

You are nature to me.

Parallel World's

Rocks lock in place like hands
on the ground reaching up.

Are you in the sky?
The clouds raining just to try

and touch me? I float
on this crust and you
float in the sky.

I imagine it's parallel.

I pretend we could always be this
close. Like miles between states.

We look up at the same stars
until we become them. Run in a field
enough and I'll conjure your soul in the wind.

Half Full/Half Doubt

I watch as they flock to the spots
seemingly drenched in sun.

I linger with the lonely lunar
losing myself in her light.

I can't tell if this is sabotage
or self-fulfillment. I find myself
in rocks tucked to a corner.

I order the layers of years
as the sun sears my back.

I laugh at bubbling insecurities
falling flat inside this canyon.
I am shrunk

to

size.

Only to find insecure overwhelms.
At the helm I plunge.

 If I drown I am gone.

But half insecure still remains.
The river washes towards me for comfort,
a hurt I recognize.

UNTIL I CAME BACK TO UTAH:

Glen Canyon Dam

Coral Pink Sand Dunes

Zion Canyon

Dinosaur Museum - St George, Utah

Bryce Canyon

Escalante State Park

Grand Staircase

Aquarius Plateau

Capitol Reef

Arches

Canyonlands

Virgin or River

She is trapped in the Narrows.
Where you can see her Maiden hair
ferns and flows in the river. Virgin

and kind. You walk along the rocks
of her back. Reach the end and find
yourself wanting more. Dried up and
out of sight.

So you turn around.

Against the current. You need
something to grab. Use your wood
to stick inside. Grab a hold.
Was it worth the sight?

She looks beautiful tonight.

She falls back to water.

What were you saying?

I walk forward. My foot hits a rock.
The ripples shove me down.

The Key

I emerge
sand freed from slumber.
The wind kisses me once again.

I am the key to your past.
Locked from mine.
Unraveled and laid out
close enough to reach

but too weak to join.

I spoil my mystery
because I loudly weep with the wind
and you steal my sand for a shelf.

Allochthon

I cracked my laces at a fault.
I tripped on a rock
and tried to sound it out.

Allochthon.
A-lock-thon.

I lock down with the plates
as I roam with allochthon.
I am sediment, but not fixed.

I shift—
 I corrupt—
 I ache—

I am longing for a place.

I am dragged—
 I am misplaced—
 I wander—

 I forget
 who

 I
 am.

 Erosion taking

 its toll.

A-lock-thon.
Allochthon.

I tie my shoe.

I walk along lithified rock.

I learn the next name.

Inside the Temple Cap

I am in a bed of red.

I turn to salt and drip
down.

I confound the masses.
Intrigue the masters.

I am a temple that you can not enter.

At the center I spread wide because I am
capped. Now a
drop.

Birds fly blue.

I hide from the untrained eye.

Formed in the Pleistocene

I press flowers and count
the hours since I was born.
Since I was curled in the womb

of my mother. The Pleistocene served as
steady ground. I heard only sound.
Mother's laughter and father's voice.
I felt my grandparents' love.

I noticed a fault.

Reverse.

Pushed me up and
far away I felt the rest.

Love without a name.
I barely knew my own.

I still felt.

I took my first steps in the Pleistocene.
Learned to run on the Jurassic. We ran away.

The hours reversed and family waved
from land. I took to the sky and counted
the stars until I'd see the Pleistocene again.

Wrapped in the heat. My feet kiss
the land. I walk in the tracks of my first
steps. I am back where it all began.

I pick flowers on the path. Time
is not linear. I follow the rocks.

Will I Live Long Enough to Become a Fossil Too?

What one geologist knows
the other never sees.

Separated by ages how can we
study what never stays the same?

Step so many times in one place,
it will erode away.

Laugh so hard you hear
echoes from years ago.

From love tucked in joints
And hands touching rocks

eroded away. I hold the rock
I hold a hand. Centuries pass.

I walk through the ages
and so I lack time.

Will my footsteps at least
become fossils too?

Rocks Don't Rush

All erosion is time.

Will you spend it with me?

When so much time has been waited,
tell me you love me where all time will converge.

Rocks fall and skies go dark,
Will you marry me under the arch?

Archive the Arches

We climb what could be
gone. Matter until we don't.
Touch what we're told does.

When it fades we suffer. Try
to recover. Reconstruct.
Today I write. I read.

Archive the arches
until it
 crumbles
 down.

And even then,
stand in the spot
where it was.
Listen to the wind.

Wait for the rocks to rise again.

Solitaire

I listen to his drawl. I try to understand.
Lost in the woods he panders to the parks.
He divulges it all.

I sleep on popcorn weathering
crumbling into the earth, I fall.
His voice an echo. A guide.

Lamenting Lacoliths

Isolated we get closer. Surrounded
in warmth. I retreat to cold.
Speciate and overcompensate.
Create until it breaks. Faults.
Yours, hers, mine. Break down in the end.
Ignore the beauty as you fall
down the canyon. I craved to get out.

Inside my home I wish I'd carved further
into the ground. I dream of it's walls.
I was caved in. To be lonely or alone.
The same in my mind. It breaks. It rains.
I'm back to the sky. The droplets only touch my face.

Tell Me A Story

Here's what I think happened. You eroded. I sunk. You tossed me like junk and I fell back to the earth. I melted into magma and back up I shot. Lithified and undefined. I live where no one does. I die where everyone does. I am on the edge. Cracked but not broken. Heralded for my resilience. An arch that won't lose but was not always here. I am crossed by beds that I don't get to sleep in. I am jointed in formations. You climb.

I fall.

AND THEN WE SAID GOODBYE:
Monument Valley
Goosenecks of the San Juan
Sunset Crater

Lichenometry

I trace your body
for lichenometry.
Freckles, a lichen.

How long has it seen
the sky? Your skin,
my mind. I'd rather be

(
trapped
inside
with you
all the time.

But you grab my hand,

drag
me
out.
)

We trace the rocks
and gawk at time. Find the line
in the lime where we would've met.
Kiss my resting hand
touching where we are now.

I recognize you. In the rocks
we have more time. We erode
back to the lime.

The Aspen Grove

I shot the moon and lost
the stars. Direct me to the end.
I fell down. We grew up
in the Grand Canyon. Lost and proud.
Broken down by rivers and faults.

Repeated language. Repeated movements.
We isolate. We speciate.
Watch time pass by. Watch your hand slip
through mine. We swim in the sky
trying to map the constellations. This time

we all fall. Deposited like rocks.
We become what we study. We become
where we are. 4.6 billion years ago
but now we form again. This book made
of paper, made of wood. Like an aspen
tug on the rizomes when you miss this.

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