

# Abbey's Boots

by Douglas Carithers

## Synopsis

The main body of my story is a description of acts, quotes, meetings and strategies leading up to a "Monkey Wrench Gang" raid. I will present the first factual and documented account of environmental activist-author, Edward Abbey's hands-on involvement in eco-sabotage amongst the moonlit slickrock canyons of southern Utah during the Spring of 1975.

Set in the locale of actual sites portrayed in his novel, The Monkey Wrench Gang, and the soon to be paved and named Bicentennial Highway, gang members are revealed in true form, especially one known as the "Lone Ranger", a.k.a., "Kemosabe."

This colorful and enlightening story explains Abbey's determination and failure to start and drive behemoth earth-movers over slickrock canyon cliffs. Numbering at near twenty, the earth-destroying machine's technology versus Abbey's limited resources proved to be the raid's downfall in terms of accomplishment of objectives set by Abbey himself. Having failed and being enraged with frustration, further acts by Abbey that night proved equally unsuccessful and unlawful.

Following the trail of evidence will provide a portrait of how certain items collected by law enforcement officials from various agencies resulted in Abbey's deliverance from arrest, courtesy of the Lone Ranger, a.k.a., Kemosabe, whose identity has never been disclosed until now by the author. Revealed are circumstances and interconnecting links to the evidence, enabling Kemosabe to provide Abbey with an early warning system that would give Abbey time to bury self-incriminating evidence and escape detection and arrest. Interspersed throughout the story are the following: The first words spoken between Abbey and Kemosabe—and their last.

The female connection: The common link between Kemosabe and Abbey.

The burial site: What was buried? Who buried it and the approximate location, known by only two men?

How close the authorities came to catching the #1 suspect and who he was?

What the raid was? Was it successful? Opinions, quotes, and insights into Abbey's gang members and others involved and some quotable comments from a knowledgeable judge, who was also the prior Sheriff of his county at the time of the raid.

Final thoughts and explanations to the story and an environmental overview of prior "monkeyshines" by Stephen

P. Mather, first director of the National Park Service. A last view of Abbey's boots buried in a canyon. Are they still there? An intimate look at inscriptions by Abbey and other monkey-wrench gang members on the author's personal first edition of The Monkey Wrench Gang.

### The Story

Ed Abbey's frustration peaked in the Spring of 1975 as he was writing The Monkey Wrench Gang. To quell his fever and rage, Abbey personally engaged in an act portrayed in that book. It was the raid on a road construction site on the Bicentennial Highway, U-95, between Lake Powell and Fry Canyon, in which Monkey Wrench gang-member, "Hayduke," encountered the character known as the "Lone Ranger," or also known as "Kemosabe." In his sequel, Hayduke Lives, Abbey accomplished on paper what he failed to do that night in the canyons near Natural Bridges National Monument, Utah. He succeeded in driving the giant earth-mover, GOLIATH, over the edge of the canyon.

In reality, it went more like this: Around midnight on April 24, 1975, equipped with eleven ten-pound sacks of sugar and several gallons of shellac, bought out-of-state earlier, Abbey enlisted the aid of "Monkeyman." Driving the old primer-gray panel pickup, Abbey and Monkeyman left Moab, Utah, on a full moon night, dwarfed by the shadow of the La Sal Mountains and headed south to White and Fry canyons near Natural Bridges National Monument. A six-pack later, Monkeyman was able to see the picture Abbey painted as to what the plan was, and by the time they arrived at the scene, Monkeyman had Abbey's masterpiece visualized. Monkeyman was simply to be the lookout for Abbey. He would watch for approaching headlights that could be seen miles from the area, while Abbey conducted his monkey-business.

Abbey attempted to start the machinery to be used at the time from Hite Marina to the highway running north and south from Bluff to Blanding, Utah. It would be called the Bicentennial Highway, in honor of the Nation's 200th birthday. Abbey had many reasons for not wanting this road paved and he was now preparing to send a message to the San Juan County Commissioners by attempting to drive one of the giant earth-movers off the cliffs of White Canyon. Due to Abbey's mechanical inability's, he ran into one obstacle after another. Frustrated and unable to start the engines in any of the twenty machines, Abbey went to his old gray panel truck and pulled out the reliable stand-by: sugar and shellac! Hasty obvious actions and an improper mixture with the shellac, and a sugar trail, would alert the machine operators the next morning, that "monkeys" had indeed been playing on their equipment.

By 3:00 a.m., having exhausted all resources to sabotage the machinery, Abbey, tired and frustrated, exasperated beyond reason, pulled out his pistol and fired several rounds at the ten-foot diameter tires. They merely bounced off the giant wheels. Within hours daylight would reveal fresh footprints,

tire treads, sugar trails, eleven discarded empty sugar sacks and other signs of monkey business as the rising sun's rays caught new shadows left on the red-brown earth.

Monkeyman and Abbey left the scene and were back in Moab before daybreak. In their hasty retreat they forgot Rule #1 of all Monkey Wrenchers, DON'T GET CAUGHT! But they had left evidence; strong, incriminating evidence that could have convicted them both. Abbey's local reputation and environmental writing made him a suspect along with other "Seldom Seen" suspects. Abbey forgot that in this case, the slogan, "Take only pictures and leave only footprints" did not apply! [What were you thinking, Ed?] The evidence was collected, photographed, documented and distributed. It connected them to the crime scene and so they would be discovered. But as fortune would have it, they were intuitively suspected by a friend of Monkeyman and by mere association, held their fate in his hands. There was no question of what he would do—the Lone Ranger a.k.a. Kemosabe came to their rescue. And so Kemosabe acted as a true friend would—more friend than ranger, and made it possible for both Abbey and Monkeyman to escape. It was Monkeyman's heel print that instantly gave Kemosabe the clue that he needed.

It went this way: When Kemosabe awoke that crisp Spring morning to a crowd of lawmen nearby where he had camped, it was with highly tuned senses that he heard the familiar law enforcement chatter, amidst a gathering of various agencies and vehicles. It seemed reminiscent of a scene from the film, "Alice's Restaurant." Only the helicopters were missing.

Rolling out of his sleeping bag, Kemosabe quietly joined the cluster of lawmen. Knowing that he was not just a tourist in their midst, evidence passed before him and instantly his eyes singled out and focused on an 8 x 10 glossy black and white photograph that revealed a Vibram sole footprint with a steel tap on the heel. Goosebumps broke out all over his body and he thought, "They didn't!" He only knew of the one person who wore taps on his waffle-stompers; Monkeyman! Kemosabe suddenly knew what had happened, what he had to do and that he was the only one that could do it. He knew in his heart he could and had to do this for his friend. Fate had placed him at this place and time to enable him to stop the sure arrest or exposure of that friend and the current environmental icon of the time.

Kemosabe quickly departed the gathering and headed north to track down Monkeyman and Abbey. He was in reality, acting out the role he would assume by his own actions, not the role portrayed in Abbey's books. Suddenly, enroute to Moab, he became in his own mind, the Lone Ranger—and very alone in his mission. A full lunar eclipse was only days away and a new chapter in his life would begin the following morning.

Early on that morning, following the raid at Fry and White canyons, Kemosabe pulled into the parking lot at the City Market in Moab. He spotted Abbey's faded red Volkswagen bug and approached him, chuckling to himself, knowing why

Abbey was driving it rather than the familiar old gray panel truck he was known to use. Abbey was reading the Moab Times-Independent, eating a jelly doughnut, as Kemosabe tapped on the passenger window, and spoke his first words to Abbey, “We need to talk about last night.” Abbey shuffled the paper, while juggling the doughnut and opened the door. Kemosabe sat down in the passenger seat and introduced himself, calmly advising Abbey he was not there to do anything but to let him know that he should get rid of the evidence, which the San Juan County Sheriff’s Department and the Utah Highway patrol had on him.

Abbey’s eyes widened. Surprise and subdued, he said, “It’s kinda’ humbling...I just got so...”. His words trailed off into silence. The air seemed thick in the Volkswagen bug—tight quarters. Abbey offered Kemosabe one of his doughnuts. Then Kemosabe said, “You need to switch out the tires, and get rid of your boots that you wore on the raid. Bury them—now! Monkeyman is waiting at his house for you. He’s got a place picked out and ready to bury everything.”

Abbey tried to explain why he did it, but could not summon the right words. Kemosabe reached for the door handle and said, “I enjoyed Desert Solitaire, next time wear moccasins...gotta go.” They shook hands briefly and parted. This was the way Abbey met Kemosabe. Fate had intervened and placed a bond between the men that would endure till Abbey’s death, years later. Their meeting had remained unspoken until now.

Monkeyman and Abbey loaded the evidence into Monkeyman’s camper-truck and headed for the grave site chosen for the evidence, known to this day by only two men—and maybe a buzzard or two circling over the area from time to time.

This incident can be corroborated by evidence taken and filed by the investigating agencies in San Juan County, Utah, that were dispatched to the scene that day. The only evidence linking Abbey and Monkeyman to that scene that day. The only evidence linking Abbey and Monkeyman to that area was buried. The boots could be “resurrected” and bronzed but there are only two “monkeys” alive that know where these boots are located. One has another life in another place, and Kemosabe...well he’s still trying to sort out why he saved Abbey’s hide, because looking back, if Abbey had been busted, it may have well have resulted in even more fame and cash income from the publicity, than he’d received up to that point. Then again, maybe the Lone Ranger would never have surfaced. The conviction could have made Kemosabe famous—but an outcast among environmentalists. But Kemosabe chose to remain true to himself and his good friend, Monkeyman. Let history judge what it wants and let the eco-raiders, saboteurs, tribal copy-cats and green panthers form their own opinions. The myth will remain by the perpetuation of the truth—and the legend is sound and true.

And about those old boots, buried in a canyon—so many to search in.

