After 70 days on the river, the Kolbs lit a fire to signal their arrival at the foot of Bright Angel Trail. Emery's wife and daughter spotted the fire through a telescope. NAU.PH.568.3127

The Big Trip

The Kolb brothers believed a trip by river through Grand Canyon would help to promote their photography business. Motion picture cameras had been around for a while, but had never been used to film the canyons and rapids of the Green and Colorado Rivers. Ellsworth and Emery decided to be the first to do so, and began plans for what they called the "Big Trip."

Leaving Green River, Wyoming, on September 8, 1911, the Kolb brothers retraced John Wesley Powell's famous expedition of 1869, carrying a hand-cranked motion picture camera. At the time, only a few parties had descended the river through Grand Canyon. In spite of their limited boating experience, they launched two wooden boats and headed downriver with only one assistant to learn white-water boating the hard way.

Two months and eight days later, they reached the foot of the Bright Angel Trail, pulled their boats ashore, and hiked to the rim to spend a month at home and see if they had successfully captured the journey on film.

Ellsworth and Emery left again in freezing temperatures to complete their trip to Needles, California, another 185 miles downstream. Having spent 101 days on the water, and covering 1,167 river miles, they arrived in Needles in early 1912.

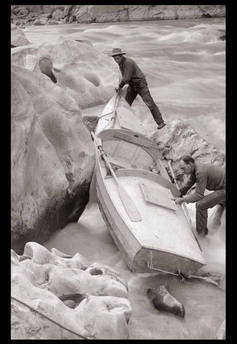
On January 18, 1912, the Kolb brothers reached their destination at Needles, California. NAU.PH.568.2991

Ellsworth posed with the motion picture camera used to record their legendary trip. NAU.PH.568.278

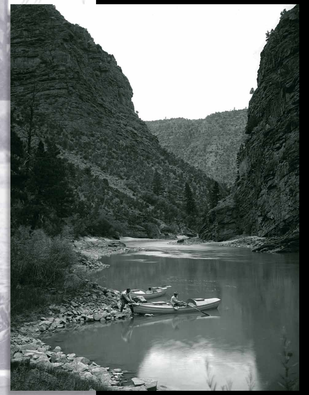
Young Jimmy Fagen (in boat) accompanied the brothers through the Canyon of Lodore, on the Green River, but left the trip shortly thereafter. NAU.PH.568.9120

Ellsworth cleaned the cameras in camp on the river bank and dried them near the campfire. NAU.PH.568.948

Boulders and rushing waters in Cataract Canyon dwarfed the boats. NAU.PH.568.9750

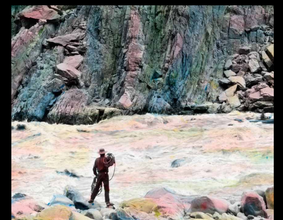


Ellsworth Kolb (right) and Bert Lauzon lined the boats over rocks filmed with ice at Separation Rapid. NAU.PH.568.8844



Still waters entering Flaming Gorge behind the challenging rapids that awaited downstream on the Green River. NAU.PH.568.1565

After a one-month layover on the rim, the brothers resumed their journey to Needles, California, 185 miles downstream. NAU.PH.568.9027



Bert Lauzon waited on shore with rope at the ready, should rescue be needed. NAU.PH.568.9000

Boat and boulder collided in Wahlsenberg Rapid on Christmas Eve, 1911. The Kolb brothers spent Christmas Day patching the hole with mesquite ribs, tin, and canvas. NAU.PH.568.3417

"The fact that over two hundred people were content to stand throughout your entire entertainment is a great tribute to your power as a speaker and the nature of your subject."

—Gilbert Grosvenor, President of the National Geographic Society

"Grand Canyon Film Show"

After completing the "Big Trip," Emery traveled the United States showing his "Grand Canyon Film Show" and lecturing to captivated audiences. Avid crowds gathered at Carnegie Hall to see the rugged landscape of the canyon and hear Emery speak. He even lectured for Alexander Graham Bell and fellow scientists in Washington, D.C.

Bell introduced Emery to his son-in-law Gilbert Grosvenor, president of the National Geographic Society; this meeting was the beginning of a life-long friendship between the two men.

While Emery traveled, Ellsworth wrote an account of their adventure and accompanied it with their photographs. *Through the Grand Canyon from Wyoming to Mexico* was published by MacMillan in 1914.

By 1915 the Kolbs had expanded their studio on the rim to include an auditorium. On April 15, Emery gave his first lecture at Kolb Studio using a motion picture projector hand-cranked by an assistant. This was the first of thousands of film lectures spanning 61 years, making it the longest-running movie of all time.

Lining the boat through Triplet Rapid in Lodore Canyon. NAU.PH.568.3270