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Upper Gneiss

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UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

Bridge Canyon Project, Arizona

Geology of the

UPPER GNEISS DAM SITE

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March 1943

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## GEOLOGY OF THE UPPER GNEISS DAM SITE

### INTRODUCTION

The Upper Gneiss dam site is the original Bridge Canyon dam site named by Larue (1) and is one of the four dam sites in this vicinity under investigation by the Bridge Canyon Project in northwestern Arizona. A concrete dam of about 690 feet above bedrock is contemplated, principally for the development of power.

### SUMMARY

1. Geological conditions are favorable at the Upper Gneiss site for the construction of a concrete dam. A dam of approximately 690 feet will rest on good hard granite injection gneiss which is believed competent to hold any size or type of dam where unaffected by structural defects.
2. One vertical fault and one horizontal shear plane need further exploration before final conclusions can be reached as to the method of treatment.
3. Sound rock is exposed over most of the area so stripping will be confined to keyways and general shaping up.
4. Percolation tests show the rock to be impermeable below the depth of weathering. Bedrock was encountered at elevation 1152 in the deepest channel.

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(1)

Larue, E. C., U.S.G.S. Water Supply Paper 556 - Water Power and Flood Control of Colorado River below Green River, Utah, 1925.

5. Satisfactory natural deposits from which to obtain concrete aggregate are not available within reasonable distance of the dam site. It appears that the best possibility is to utilize the Redwall limestone which is found on the south rim and process aggregate by crushing. It is believed a satisfactory product can be obtained by this method.

#### LOCATION

The Upper Gneiss dam site is located on the Colorado River one half mile below Gneiss Canyon and about 1 mile below Bridge Canyon in Mohave County, Arizona. The dam site is about 23 miles northwest of Peach Springs, Arizona. This is the nearest town and railway junction. See Location Map.

#### ACCESSIBILITY

Transportation is a serious problem because of the inaccessibility of the dam site. At present there are 22 miles of unimproved road from Peach Springs into Hindu Canyon and a 10 mile pack trail from Hindu Canyon down Bridge Canyon to the dam site. During the present investigation, equipment and supplies were carried by boat from Pierce's Ferry to the dam site. The distance from Pierce's Ferry to the dam site is 43 miles and the trip can be made in four hours when conditions are ideal which is when Lake Mead is at high stage. At times during high spring floods and also during extremely low water trip by boat becomes hazardous and at times impossible.

#### TOPOGRAPHY

The dam site is located in the narrow Granite Gorge cut by the Colorado river in the uplifted Kaibab Plateau of horizontal sedimentary rocks. With the exception of the flat shelf called the Tonto rim the

sides of the canyon are impassable vertical cliffs many of which are 500 feet in height. The Tonto rim was formed by the soft shale weathering back leaving a narrow flat shelf of hard Tapeats sandstone. It is the only break in the cliffs and also the only continuous relief available, with slopes flat enough for shops, roads, and buildings without prohibitive excavation.

The river follows an irregular course inherited from an earlier and much higher topography and cuts across hard and soft layers alike with no regard for structure. The small side canyons within the inner gorge are influenced more by the resistance of the rock. Most of these have developed along lines of weakness. Softer mica schists, fractured gneiss, old shear zones and fault planes have been attacked by erosion more rapidly than the more massive rock and sharp reentrants are the result. Spillway draw below the dam site is in softer mica and garnet schists. The saddle at elevation 1800 on the right abutment is due to erosion on the fracture zone along the fault shown on the Geology Map. Other examples are evident near the site.

There is very little overburden on the abutments and that only in thin patches. The rock is unusually sound on the surface without the usual decomposition and alteration of the rock surface. Periodic scouring of the bedrock beneath the river channel has left the bedrock surface sound and hard as will be noted in the drill logs.

#### REGIONAL HISTORY

The history of the rocks is complex, especially that of the Archean gneiss which has been subjected to much metamorphism. Briefly, the history at the site is believed to be as follows:

A series of sedimentary shales, sandstones, and limestones were

metamorphosed to various types of mica, garnet, hornblende, and diopside schists. The limestones were changed to marble. These schists were folded and then intruded by a pink biotite granite magma along the schistose planes forming a granite injection gneiss. Some xenoliths of the schists were not completely assimilated. Later dynamic stresses occurred which fractured the rock on definite planes. The horizontal slip plane shown on the map and sections is of this origin. Later intrusions of diabase followed these fractures and partially healed them. During the Algonkian era this mass of Archean gneiss was subjected to erosion and produced a relatively flat but irregular erosion plane. During Cambrian times the sea came in over this old erosion surface and deposited the Tapeats sandstone and later the shales and limestones. Deposition continued intermittently until the Cenozoic time when the region was arched up forming the Kaibab Plateau and the then existant Colorado river began cutting the Grand Canyon and the Granite Gorge.

## ROCK FORMATIONS

### ARCHEAN SYSTEM

#### BASAL GNEISS

The term 'basal gneiss' is given the Archean gneiss and schists below the Tapeats sandstone. At the Upper Gneiss site these rocks are granite injection gneiss and a series of schists. The granite injection gneiss is formed by fluid granite wedging its way along the schistose planes of the mica schists forming parallel bands of pink colored biotite granite and bands of fine grained mica and other ferro-magnesian minerals. The quality of this rock is excellent.

It is very hard, massive, resistant and impermeable and free from fractures as shown by the percolation tests during drilling. The schists are hard sound rock but are more easily weathered than the gneiss.

Where unaffected by structural defects this rock represents the maximum in crushing strength and is competent to hold any type or size of structure possible to build. Two structural defects are known, the horizontal fracture and the vertical fault or open fissure on the right abutment. These will be discussed later.

#### CONTACT OF THE SANDSTONE AND GNEISS

The contact between the Archean gneiss and the Tapeats sandstone is well exposed and was examined in many places. The Geology map shows stadia elevations along the contact. The surface of the gneiss represents the ancient land surface during Algonkian and early Cambrian times. The gneiss is weathered and altered from 3' to 15' in depth with the feldspars partially weathered to clay and the quartz is poorly consolidated in the matrix of clay and iron oxide.

In places where the clay covering is thin or absent the Tapeats sandstone is well bonded to the gneiss below but ordinarily from two inches to several feet of clay, now consolidated to dense red shale, covers the weathered gneiss. This shale grades into a coarse grained ferruginous arkosic sandstone.

No channels of gravel were seen and it is my opinion, based on tests on the Lower Gneiss site, that there will be no greater loss along the contact than in the sandstone above.

## CAMERIAN SYSTEM

### TAPEATS SANDSTONE

The Tapeats sandstone of Cambrian age which overlies the gneiss varies from 60 to 130 feet in thickness at the dam site.

The formation is all hard sound rock with some vertical jointing. The bedding planes average about two feet apart with some strong cross bedding. The following is a section of the Tapeats sandstone measured on the left abutment where it breaks into Spillway draw:

	Bright Angel shale above
19	Very coarse grained gritty quartzose sandstone
1	Varicolored dense shale
9.5	Coarse to medium grained quartzose sandstone
0.5	Fine grained poorly cemented soft sandstone
12	White coarse grained quartzose sandstone. Cross bedded.
1	Varicolored sandy shale
14	Hard white quartzose sandstone. Cross bedded with many vertical contraction joints.
5.5	Chocolate colored arkosic sandstone.
0.5	Red sandy shale
4.5	Coarse grained, hard, well cemented, arkosic, sandstone.
0.5	Red sandy shale
15	Coarse grained, chocolate colored, cross bedded, arkosic sandstone with thin streaks of white sandstone.
1	Fine grained soft red sandy shale.
6	Coarse grained, chocolate colored, well cemented arkosic sandstone
<hr/> 90	Gneiss below

## BRIGHT ANGEL SHALE

The Bright Angel shale overlies the Tapeats sandstone and is composed of 650 feet of shale sandstone, dolomite and limestone. A detailed section of the Bright Angel formation is as follows:

Muav limestone above	
150'	Alternating light green shale and gray limestone
100	Dark siliceous dolomite, hard and sound.
200	Alternating soft, green and red micaceous shale and light coarse grained, thin bedded, sandstone.
40	Bright red, fine grained sandstone, fairly well cemented.
145	Alternating coarse grained hard white sandstone and thin beds of soft green micaceous shale. The shale is easily weathered to soft clay.
15	Soft green micaceous shale. Very weak and easily weathered. This member is the softest and weakest rock in the vicinity and is unstable when saturated and under load.
<u>650'</u>	

### Tapeats below

The lower members of this formation weather to flat slopes and even undercut the massive limestone above so that the limestone breaks off in blocks leaving a perpendicular face. The impervious nature of this shale makes it acceptable to build a dam against but it is questionable if it would be advisable to rest a heavy load on these unstable members.

## MUAV LIMESTONE

The Muav limestone is the upper formation of the Tonto group of Cambrian age and is mainly massive limestone beds separated by thin beds of shale. The formation is about 1140 feet thick, and forms the basal part of the high nearly perpendicular cliffs seen on each side of the canyon above the Tonto rim. The limestone is hard, dense and chiefly gray in color. It is not directly involved in the engineering features of the dam.

## MISSISSIPPIAN SYSTEM

### REDWALL LIMESTONE

The redwall limestone of Mississippian age overlies the Muav and outcrops as a massive vertical cliff of red color with occasional limestone caverns. The red color is due to weathered red clay from the Supai formation above, which is carried down over the face of the cliff by water and stains the rock. The color is gray on fresh unweathered rock. A general section of the Redwall formation is:

#### Supai above

- 150' Gray limestone with thin members of shale, sandstone and some chert.
  - 100' Fine grained dense gray limestone. Breaks with a concoidal fracture.
  - 250' Coarsely crystalline gray limestone. Pure and uniform.
  - 100' Crystalline gray limestone with about 25% white chert. Cavernous at the base.
- 600' Muav below

Consideration is being given this formation as the source of all aggregate for construction. For a more detailed discussion of construction materials see geology report of the Lower Gneiss Site. (1)

## QUATERNARY SYSTEM

### TALUS

A thin deposit of talus, mainly angular boulders, is found on the left abutment but the quantity is so small it is insignificant. The overburden in the river channel is chiefly silt and fine sand with some large boulders near the bedrock. This material is permeable.

(1)

Murdock, J. Neil, Geology of the Lower Gneiss Dam Site, March 1943

## STRUCTURAL GEOLOGY

The attitude of the sedimentary rocks is practically horizontal with a dip of less than one degree downstream to the northwest. The schistosity planes in the injection gneiss strike N. 15° E. and dip 75° west or downstream at the axis.

### FAULTING

Some faulting and shearing has occurred at the site and two structural defects of this nature are readily apparent near the axis.

One is the fault or open fissure which is shown on the right abutment. See map and photographs. Although the affected zone is only 6" wide it has a marked topographic expression which shows up as a cleft in the hard gneiss. An exploratory drift is needed to completely evaluate conditions along this fault but from surface exposures it seems serious enough to require extensive special treatment, perhaps removal of the crushed material and backfilling with concrete. This area could be avoided by moving the axis upstream but the section is much wider here. The fault can not be traced to the river and it evidently does not extend beyond the point shown on the map.

The age of this fault is believed to be Pre-Cambrian and further movement is not anticipated.

The second defect is the horizontal slip or shear plane at about elevation 1300 which extends the full length of the right abutment and may be present on the left although it is not prominently exposed on the left abutment. This fracture is filled with a diabase sill downstream 1000 feet from the axis but the intrusive sill evidently is not continuous as it is not present where the fracture is exposed near the axis. This fracture is probably the result of horizontal thrusting during Pre-Cambrian

times when the forces which produced metamorphism were active. The fracture is a shear plane along which there has been some slight displacement producing parallel fracturing. Here again a drift is needed to evaluate conditions beyond the effect of weathering but this fracture is believed not so serious but probably would require grouting.

#### JOINTING

Some prominent joints are present but of little importance. These joints were probably ancient shear planes and are now a plane of schistose material which weathers more rapidly than the gneiss and are essentially sound at depth. Percolation tests in the drill holes showed no deep contraction joints and it is believed the rock is free from small fractures which will allow seepage.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

There is a distinct advantage in the height of dam than can be built at this site. A dam of 790 feet above bedrock could be built at this site without going above the Tapeats sandstone and overlapping onto the shale. Also the contact of the gneiss and sandstone is 250 feet higher here than at the Lower Gneiss site. However, other considerations such as the wider section and limitation on high water elevation are not so favorable.

## ENGINEERING FEATURES

### RESERVOIR GEOLOGY

The reservoir will be in the inner gorge of the Colorado with side walls similar to those at the dam site except that the Archean gneiss disappears beneath the channel upriver and the Tonto group forms the inner gorge. Large faults cross the Plateau but these have no effect on the reservoir. The springs which develop along the inner gorge indicate the water table is tributary to the river and no loss is expected from the reservoir.

### DIVERSION TUNNELS

Diversion tunnels in both abutments will be in hard sound granite injection gneiss with the outlet portals in hard mica schist if the tunnels extend that far down stream. See map. This rock is of excellent quality and should stand unsupported during construction. The effect of the fault in the right abutment may require supports in the fractured area for a short distance.

### STRIPPING

Sound rock is exposed over most of the surface beneath the river channel. It will require only the necessary scaling and shaping up for keyways to encounter hard, sound rock suitable for bonding purposes.

### EXPLORATION PROGRAM

Four diamond drill holes were drilled along the U-50 line to determine depth to rock and the character of the bedrock.

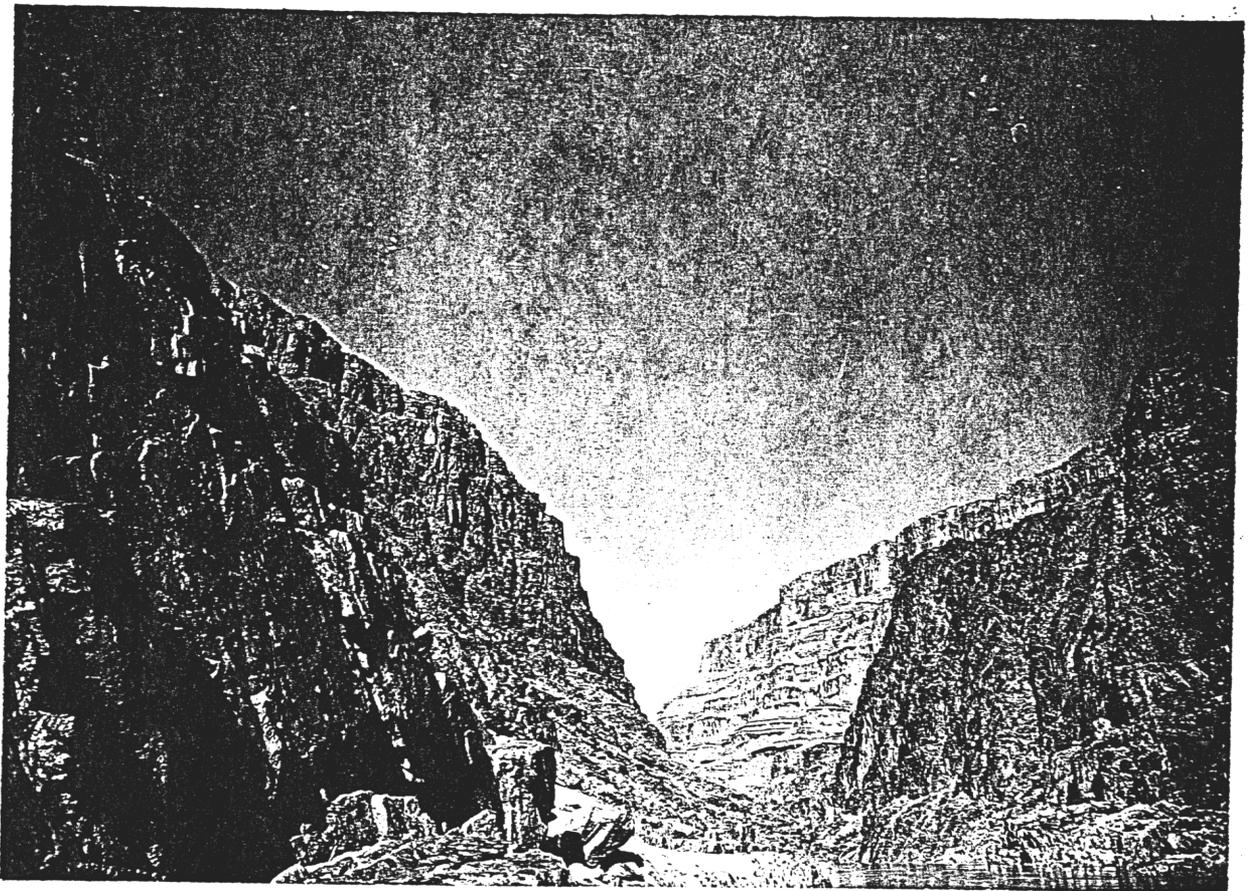
All four holes showed tight hard granite injection gneiss of the highest quality. The percolation tests showed some loss near the surface then became impermeable at greater depths when tested at 200 pounds per square inch pressure. Contraction joints probably accounted for the loss near the surface.

Except for structural defects (shear planes) already discussed it appears the foundation or abutments would take grout only in joints near the surface. No test pits or drifts were dug at this site. At the present time it appears that this site has been eliminated from further investigation. Should investigation be renewed at a future time, horizontal drifts on the fault and the horizontal shear plane would furnish information most urgently needed to properly evaluate conditions.

#### CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS

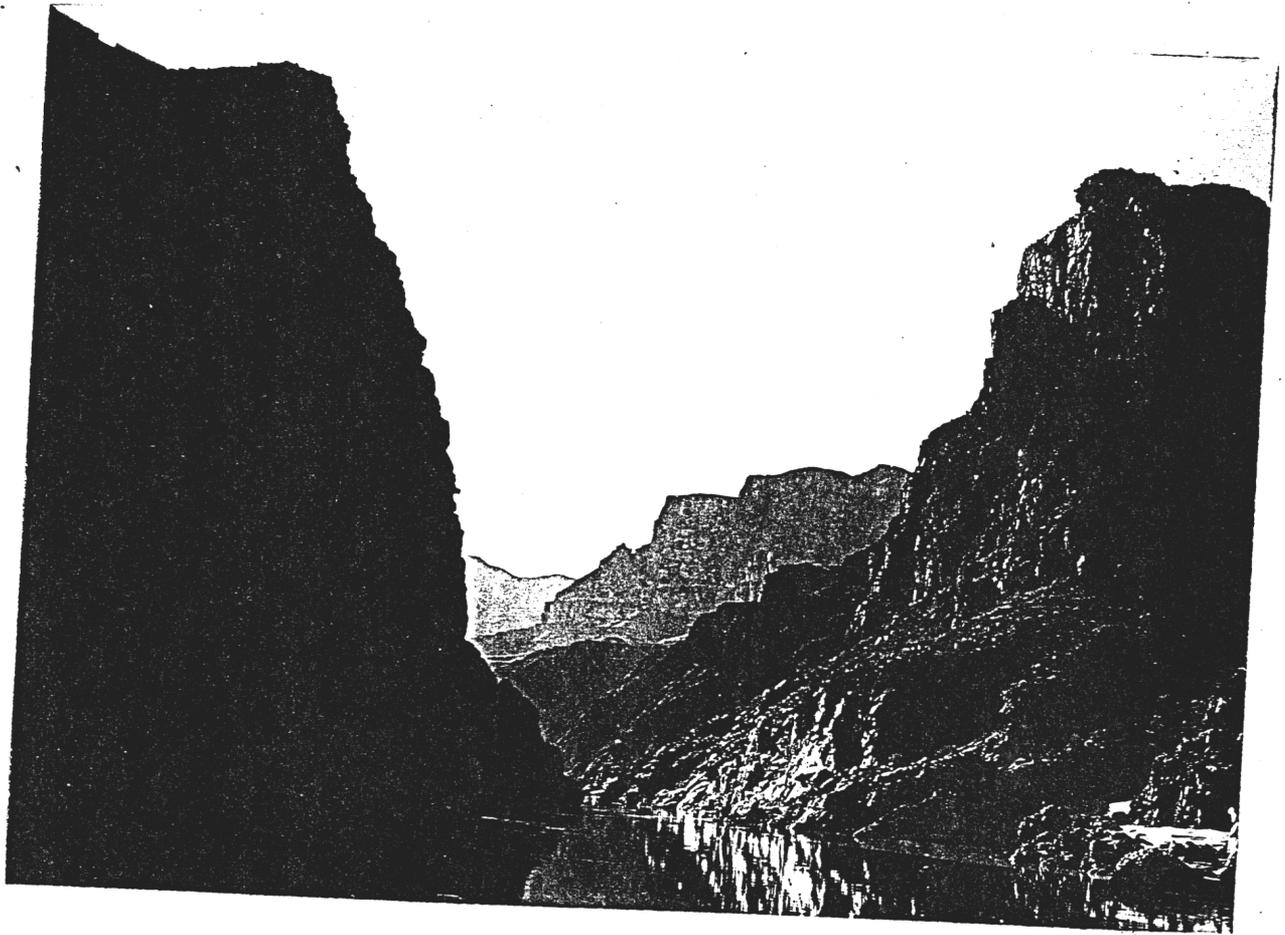
The problem of construction materials is the same as at the Lower Gneiss site. There are no suitable natural aggregates available within reasonable distance. It is believed that the Redwall limestone will provide a quarry from which suitable crushed aggregate can be processed. Samples including a carload of Redwall limestone have been submitted to the Denver laboratory for testing purposes.

*J. Neil Murdoch*



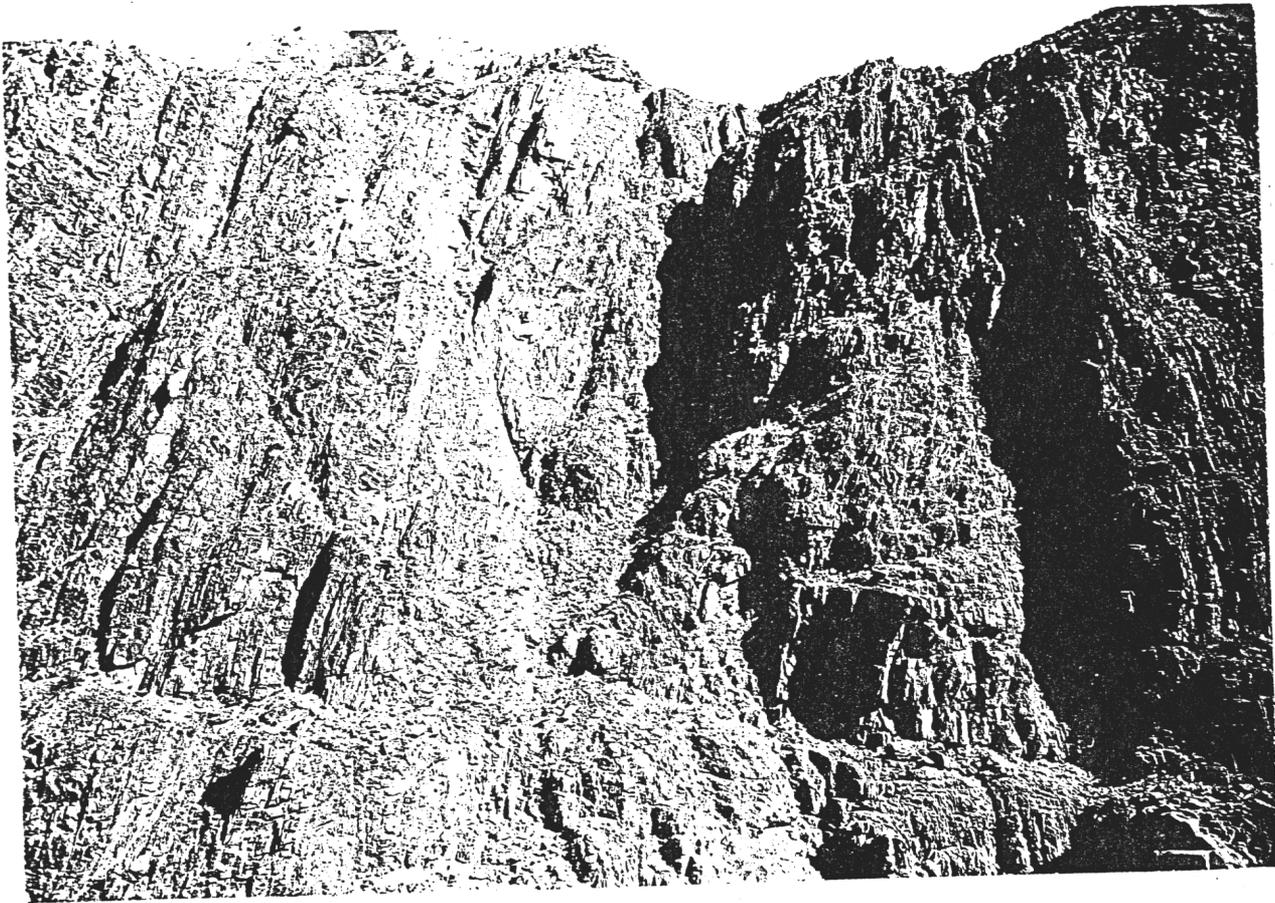
Profile of Upper Gneiss site from 2000 feet upstream. Fault or open fissure is seen on the right abutment.

Panoramic view of right abutment, Upper Gneiss site.



Profile of Upper Gneiss dam site from 2000 feet downstream

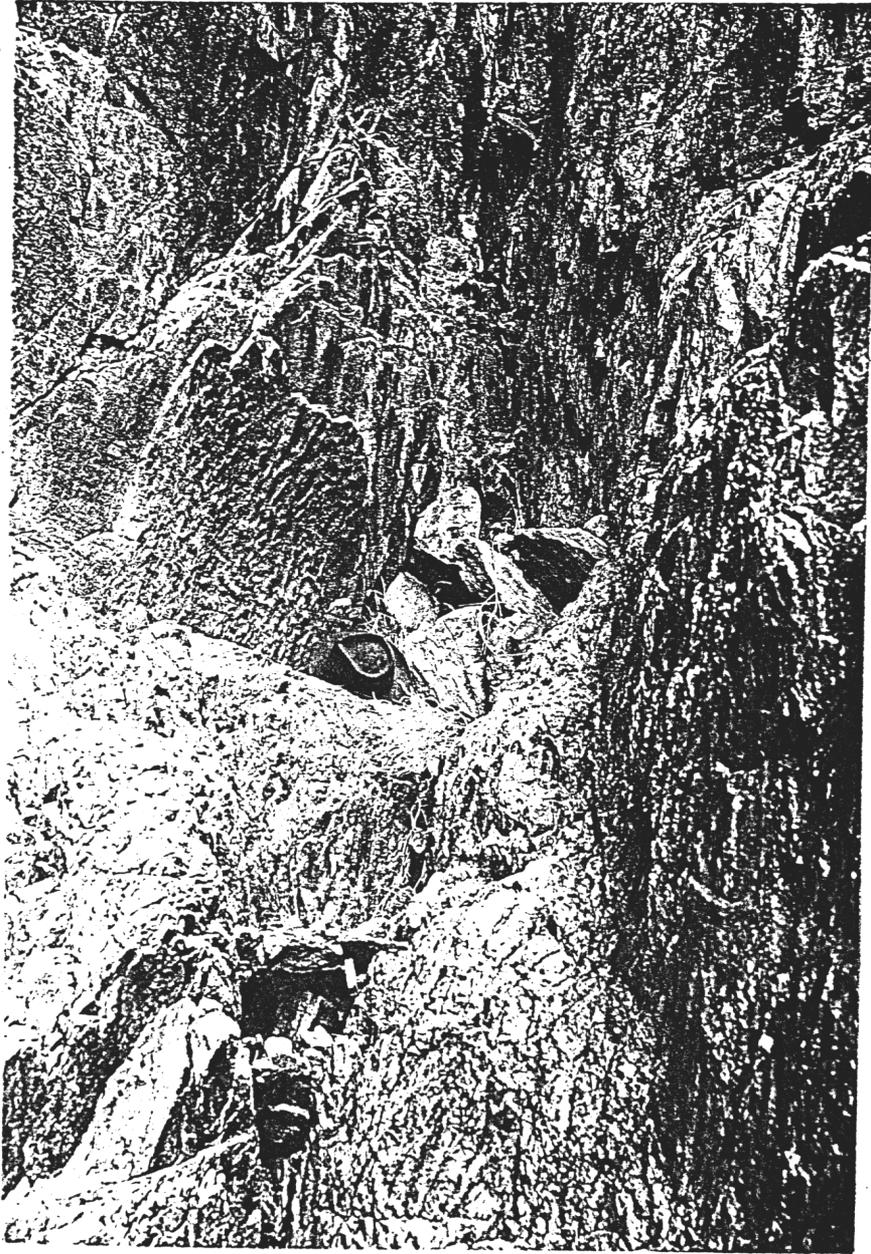
Panoramic view of left abutment, Upper Gneiss site.



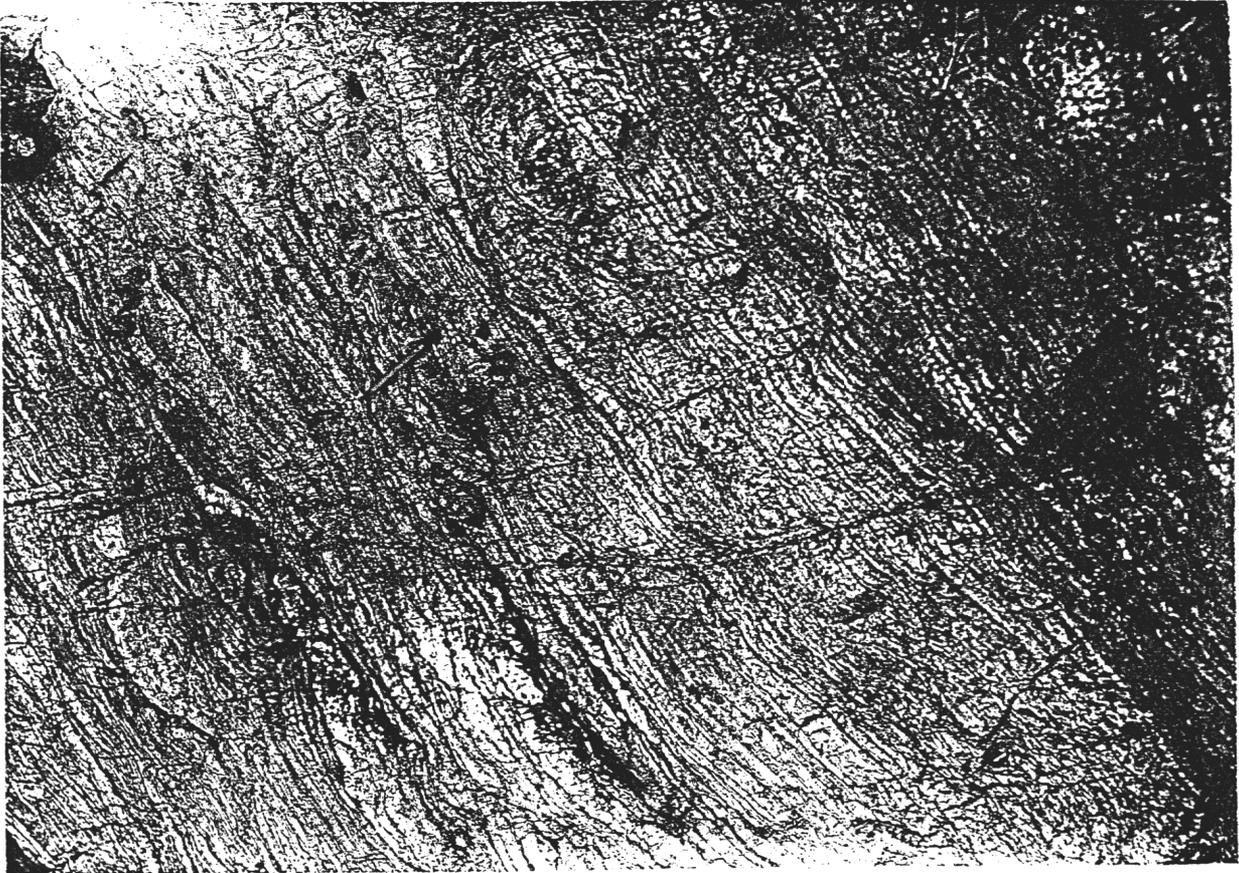
Right abutment Upper Gneiss site showing schistosity planes and two prominent joints.



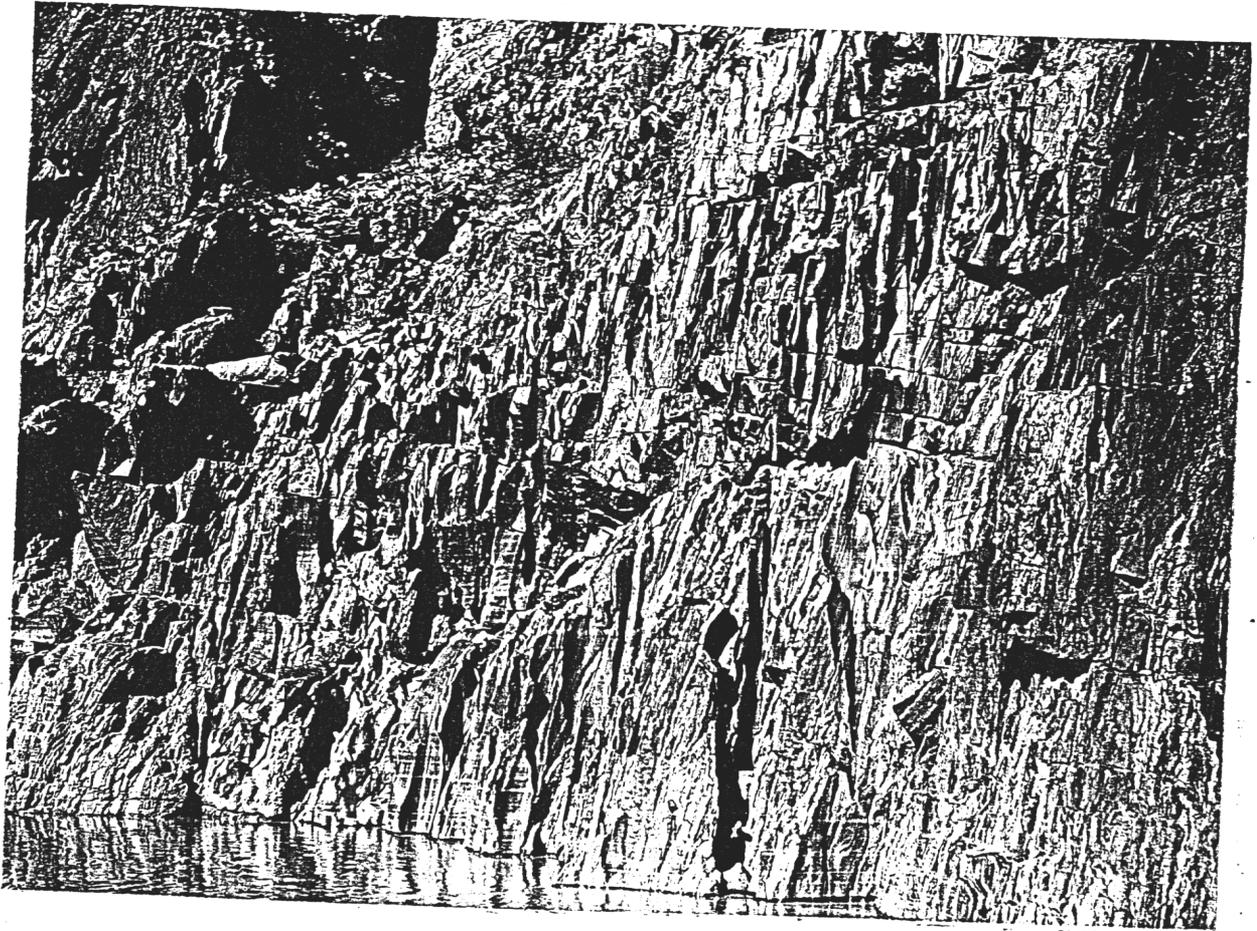
Detail of tunnel outlet portal and view of Spillway draw, Upper Gneiss site. Strata marked B. W. in foreground is a metamorphosed limestone in the mica schists showing sedimentary origin of the schists.



Close up of the fault or open fracture at Upper Gneiss site on right abutment. Rock is sound on each side with about 6" of crushed, platy, soft material which weathers more readily.



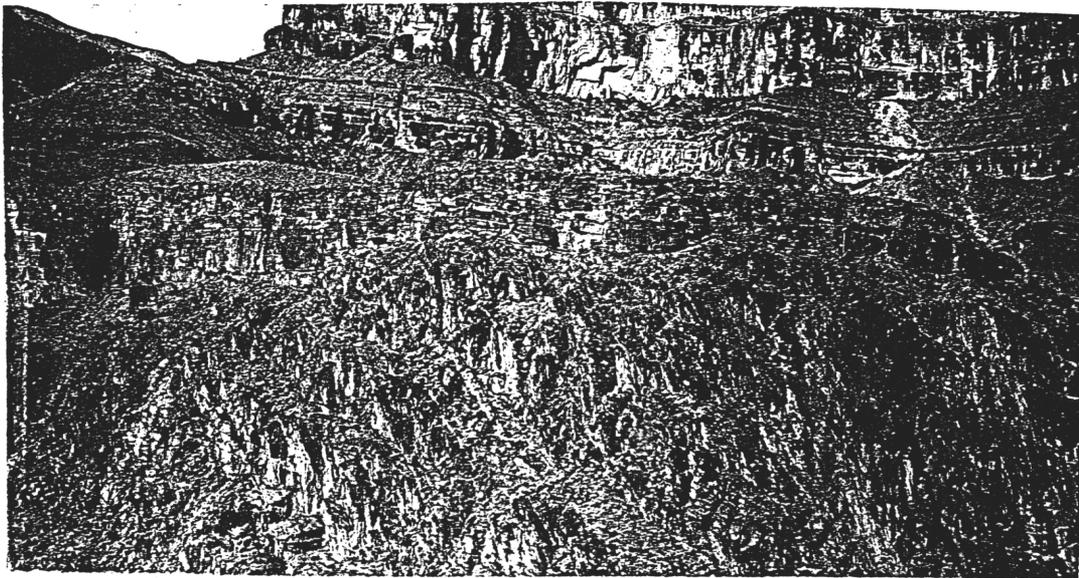
Right Abutment Upper Gneiss site. Close up showing the banded structure in the granite injection gneiss. Light streaks are coarse grained granite injected into fine grained biotite granite.



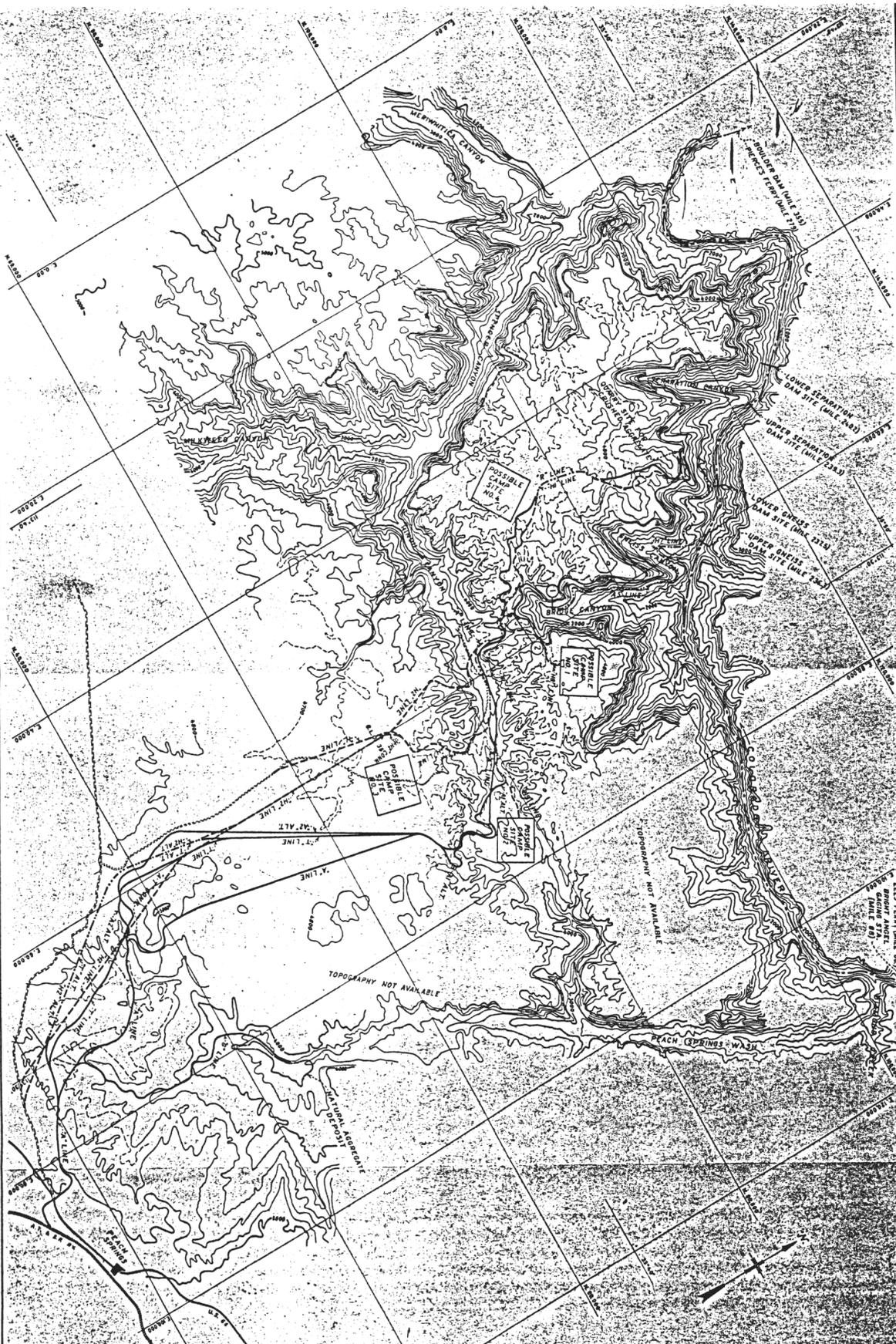
Upper Gneiss dam site on right side near axis. Shows fluting and polishing in the hard granite gneiss. This is a result of river action during flood season.



Fault or open fissure on right abutment of Upper Gneiss site.



Upper half of left abutment of Upper Gneiss site.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
 BUREAU OF RECLAMATION  
**BRIDGE CANYON PROJECT - ARIZONA**  
**GENERAL MAP**  
 DRAWN BY: J. A. JENNINGS, JR.  
 CHECKED BY: J. A. JENNINGS, JR.  
 SCALE: AS SHOWN  
 PROJECT NO. 10-10-10  
 SHEET NO. 10-10-10-10  
 DATE: 10-10-10

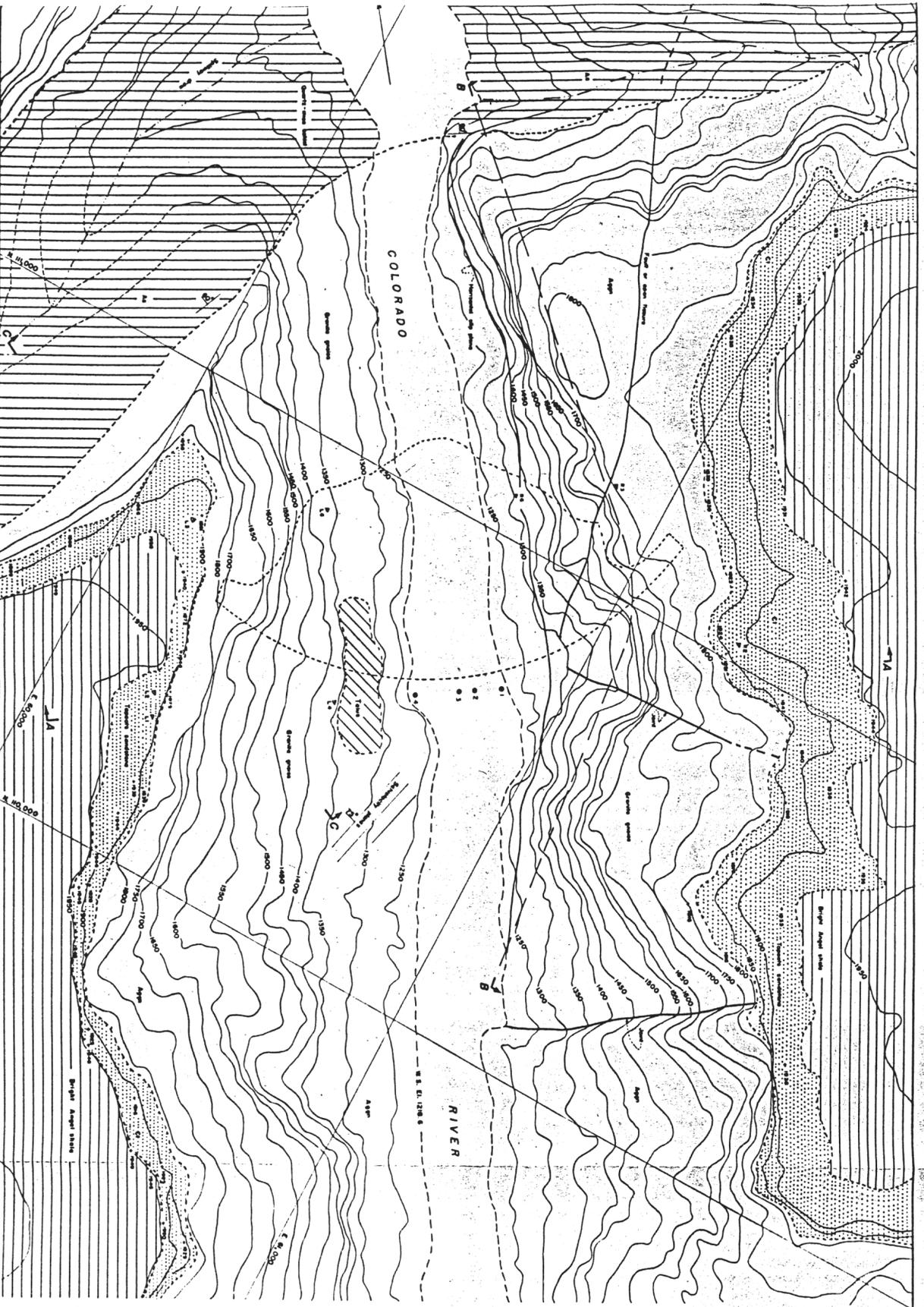
SCALE OF THOUSANDS OF FEET  
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**NOTE**  
 Contour interval 200 feet, except in certain sections where 50's are shown between the 200's. The 1000-foot contour of Bridge Canyon, railroad lines A3 and A4 and highway lines H1, H4 and H5 are not shown. Indicated railroad or highway locations may be subject to change for connections depending on adopted locations.

**LEGEND**  
 DOUBLE TRACE RAILROAD  
 RAILROAD  
 IMPROVED ROAD  
 UNIMPROVED ROAD  
 POSSIBLE DAM SITE LOCATION  
 POSSIBLE RAILROAD AND HIGHWAY CONNECTION LOCATIONS



LESS THAN 100 FEET  
 ABOUT 100 FEET  
 100 FEET  
 200 FEET  
 300 FEET  
 400 FEET  
 500 FEET  
 600 FEET  
 700 FEET  
 800 FEET  
 900 FEET  
 1000 FEET



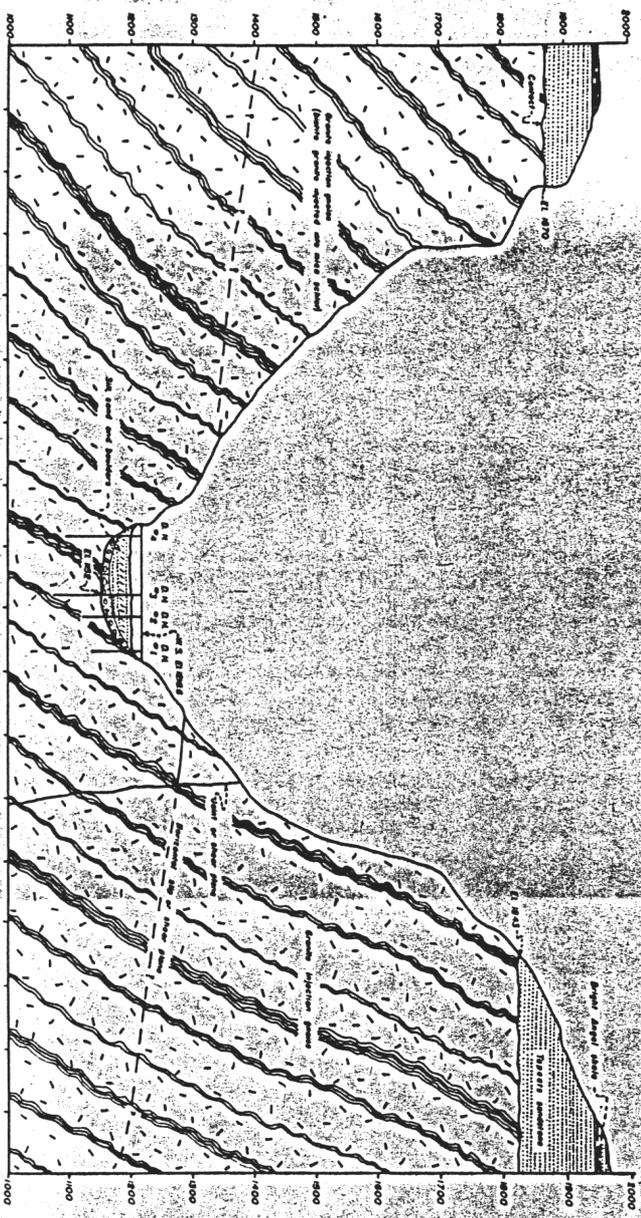
**EXPLANATION**



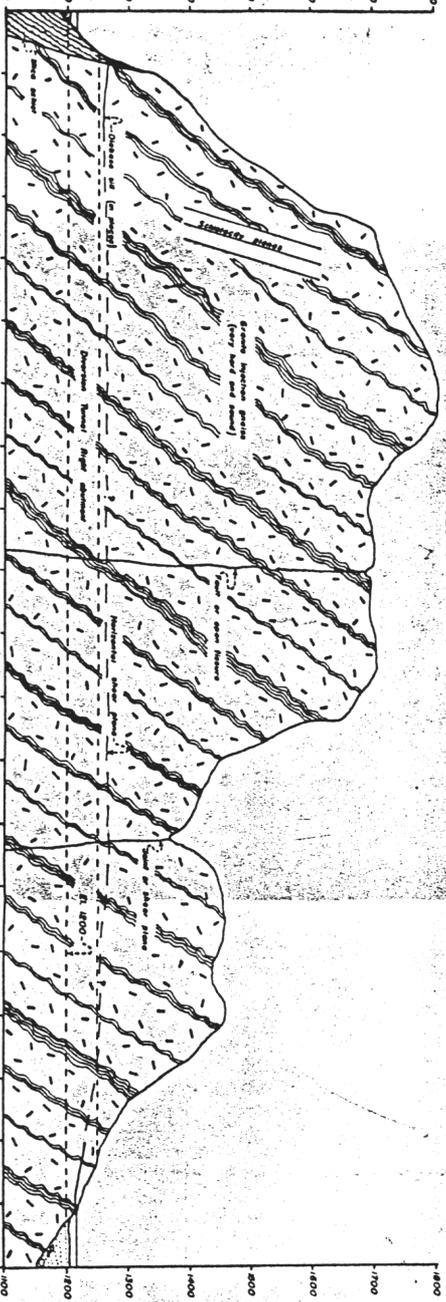
• Dammed girth holes



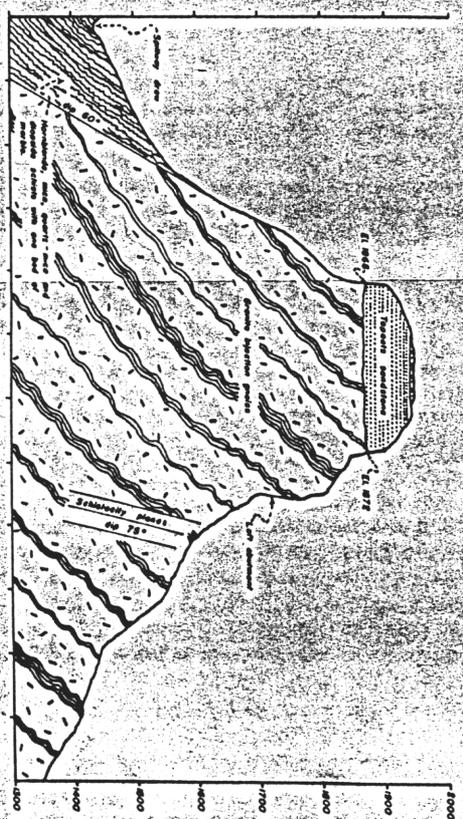
Prepared from field sketches and maps  
UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION  
BRIDGE CANYON INVESTIGATIONS, ARIZONA  
Geologic Map of the  
**UPPER GNEISS DAM SITE**  
Designed and Drawn by  
JAMES H. HARRIS  
Checked by  
W. H. HARRIS  
Project, Arizona, August, 1942



SECTION A-A



SECTION B-B



SECTION C-C



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION  
ARIZONA  
GEOLOGIC SECTIONS  
UPPER GNEISS DAM SITE

Prepared by: J. A. L. (Submitted)  
Checked by: J. A. L. (Recommended)  
Approved by: (Signature)  
Project, Arizona 723 (843)

LOGS OF DRILL HOLES 1 - 4 U-50 Line



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

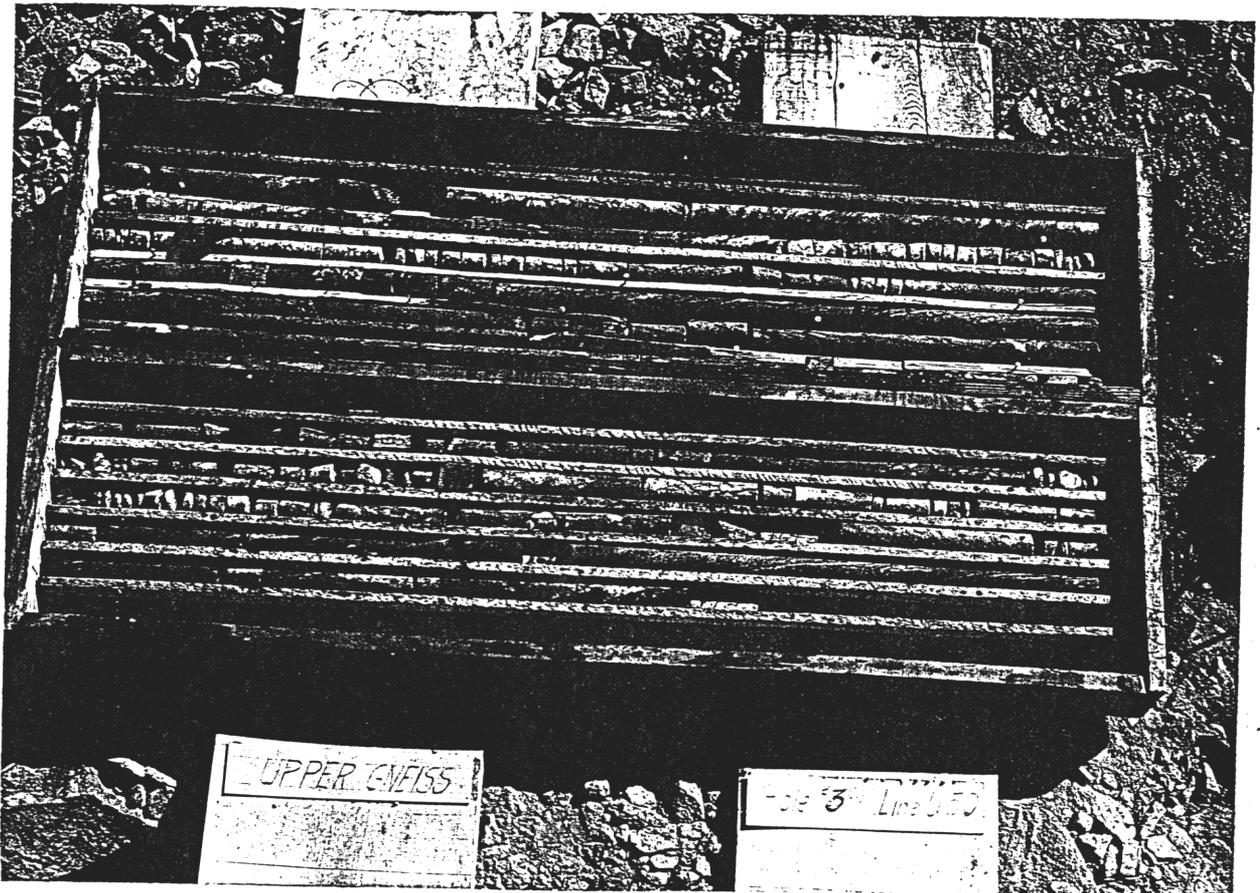
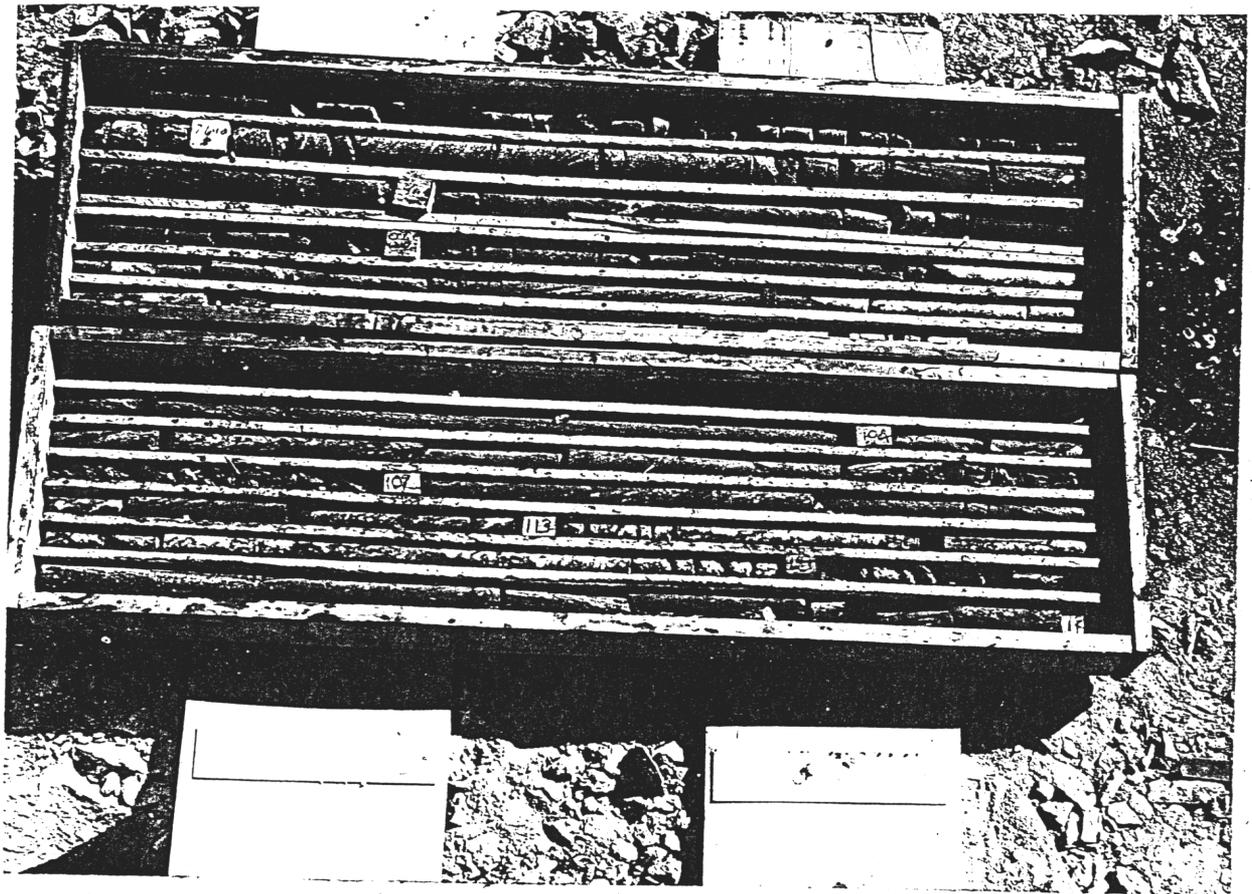
PROJECT: Bridge Canyon FEATURE: Upper Gneiss Site HOLE NO: 2 U 50  
 LOCATION: 100' from right abutment N. 110,658 E. 60,830 DRILLER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 COLLAR ELEVATION: \_\_\_\_\_ AZIMUTH OF DIP: \_\_\_\_\_ DIP: \_\_\_\_\_  
 BEGUN: \_\_\_\_\_ FINISHED: Dec. 14, 1941 DEPTH OF OVERBURDEN: 61.5 TOTAL DEPTH: 83'  
 EL. OF WATER TABLES: \_\_\_\_\_

Bit type: D = Diamond; H = Haystellite; S = Shot; W = Wash boring.

MATERIAL	BIT TYPE	DIAMETER		PERCOLATION TESTS			REMARKS (Include core recovery in feet for each pull.)
		HOLE	CORE	HOLE SEALED TO DEPTH	COLLAR PRESSURE	LOSS G.P.M.	
0 to 1.5' Barge							
1.5 to 32' Water							
32 to 56' Fine sand							
56 to 57.5' sand and gravel							Bedrock elevation approx. 1160
57.5 to 59' Boulder							
59 to 62' Sand and gravel							
62 to 63' Boulder							
63' Bedrock							
63 to 70' Soft granite gneiss							
70 to 83' Hard granite gneiss							
83' Bottom of hole							

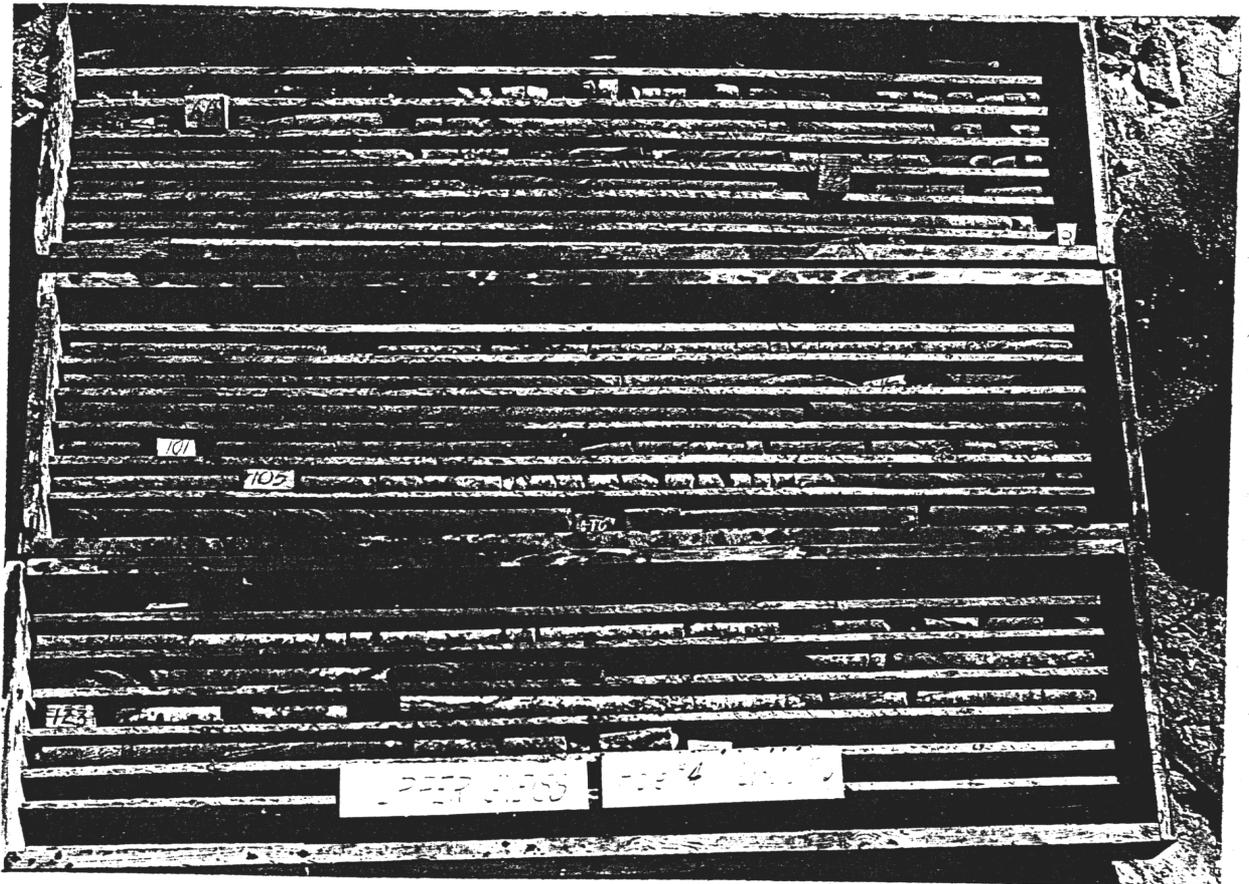






Core from Drill Hole #3 U-50 line Depth 72 - 172'





Core from Drill Hole #4 U-50 line

Depth 55 - 129'