

Kutz Canyon--Angel Peak

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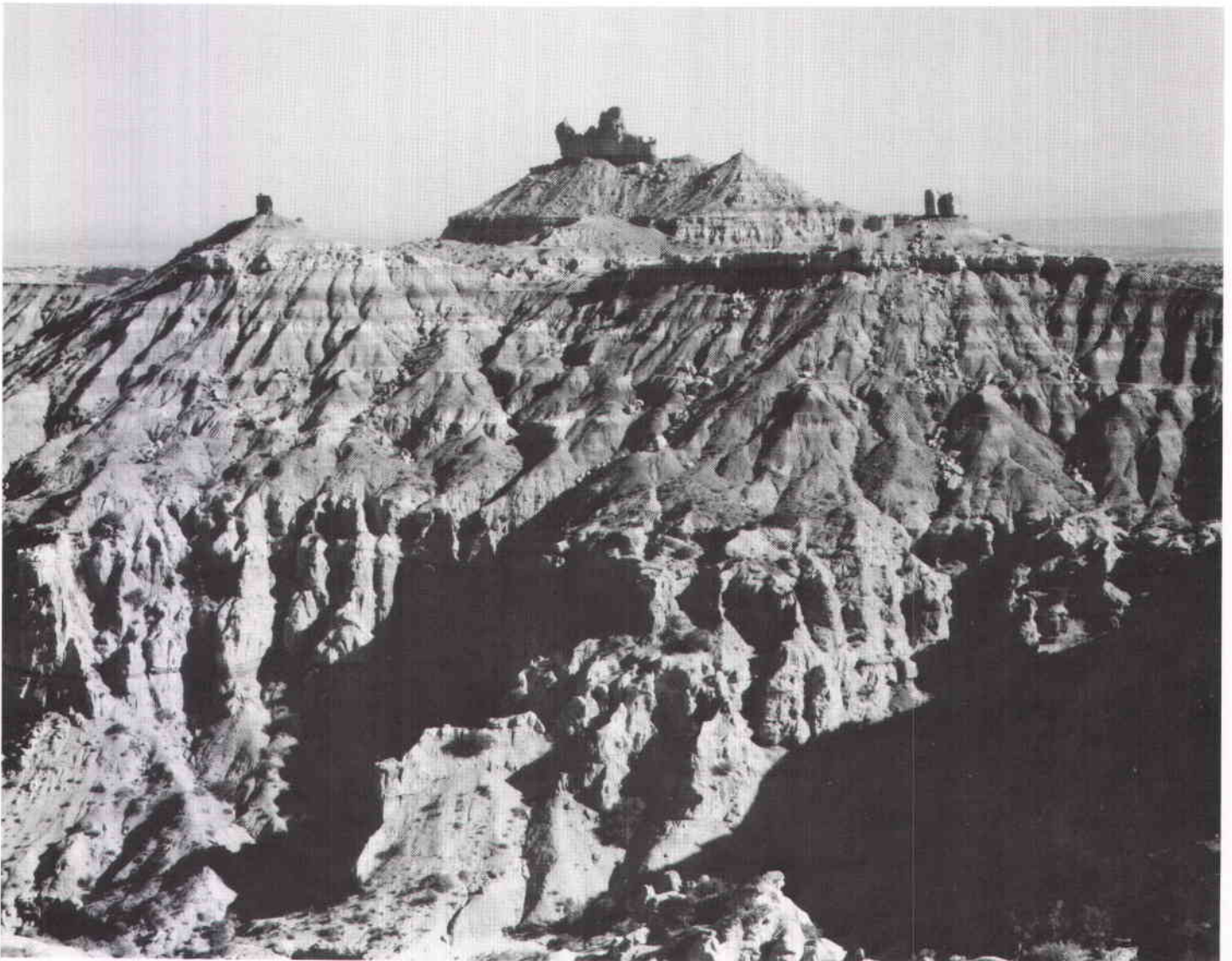
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Kutz Canyon is the approximately 65-mi² drainage area of a large, intermittent tributary of the San Juan River immediately south and southeast of Bloomfield in San Juan County, New Mexico. The canyon, origin of name unknown (an early spelling is "Coots"), is developed principally in the Paleocene Nacimiento Formation.

In Kutz Canyon, extensive, steep, colorful badlands reveal fluvial and lacustrine deposits of the lower Paleocene Nacimiento Formation. These deposits produce fossil mammals that are part of the standard of the Torrejonian land-mammal "age," a provincial time unit used by mammalian paleontologists and stratigraphers to refer to part of the early Paleocene throughout western North America. A large field of natural-gas wells has been drilled in the floor of the canyon. These wells are part of the San Juan gas field and tap beds of Late Cretaceous age.

Throughout most of the San Juan Basin, the Nacimiento Formation is overlain by the lower Eocene San Jose Formation. In Kutz Canyon, the San Jose Formation has been removed by erosion, except in one place: Angel Peak, an isolated pinnacle near

the southeastern rim of the canyon capped by sandstone and conglomeratic sandstone of the basal Cuba Mesa Member of the San Jose Formation.

Angel Peak takes its name from its resemblance to an angel with outstretched wings, although the wings are not fully symmetrical. It can be seen from well north of the San Juan River and from Chaco Canyon to the south and southwest. Angel Peak thus formed an important landmark for early travellers in the region. Indeed, archaeologists believe that the Anasazi used Angel Peak as a signal point between the giant settlements in Chaco Canyon and the Chacoan outliers near Aztec.

The photograph was taken on the morning of June 22, 1991, from the southeastern rim of Kutz Canyon looking northward. Angel Peak is the prominent sandstone "angel" to the left of center in the upper part of the photograph. The peak is San Jose Formation, and underlying strata are those of the Nacimiento Formation.

—Spencer G. Lucas and Paul L. Sealey