



From Curiosity to National Park



It is a place that was known to the ancient hunters who wandered this part of North America thousands of years ago. To the Southern Paiute it was known as “Agka-ku-wass-a-wits,” which means red painted faces, and the rock formations were the Legend People, turned to stone by Coyote. For the Mormon Pioneers the canyon they named for Ebenezer Bryce was little more than a curiosity – and a place you wouldn’t want to lose a cow. By the early 20th Century, however, the word began to spread and people today come by the millions to marvel at the wonder and timeless beauty that is *Bryce Canyon*.

Beginnings

J.W. Humphrey was transferred to the town of Panguitch in 1915 as the new Forest Supervisor of the Sevier National Forest. At the urging of Forest Service Ranger Elias Smith, Humphrey first visited the eastern escarpment of the Paunsaugunt Plateau and, surprised at the “indescribable beauty” of the canyon, almost immediately began developing plans to publicize what he had seen. Humphrey designated Mark Anderson, foreman of the forest’s grazing crew, to take on this task. Anderson had yet to see “Bryce’s Canyon” himself, and would not until the spring of 1916. Returning to Panguitch, Anderson immediately telegraphed a request for Forest Service photographer George Coshen to be sent down with still and movie cameras. Coshen arrived the following day and, upon completion, the photographs and movie were sent to Forest Service officials in Washington, D.C. as well as to Union Pacific Railroad officials in Omaha, Nebraska. In either the late spring or early summer of that year, Humphrey, with the help of Anderson and James T. Jardine, secured an appropriation of \$50 to build bridges

over the East Fork of the Sevier River and complete a dry weather road to the plateau’s rim (which ended near the site of the present Bryce Canyon Lodge). By late 1916, two articles were written about the canyon, one by Arthur Stevens, a member of the grazing crew, which was published in a Union Pacific publication, *Outdoor Life*, and the other by Humphrey, under the pen name J.J. Drew, published in Red Book, a periodical published by the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad.

The years 1917 and 1918 brought more visitors to see Bryce’s Canyon, one of the most significant being *Salt Lake Tribune* photographer Oliver J. Grimes. A full page article, “Utah’s New Wonderland,” appeared in the Tribune in August of 1918, and, along with many photographs, included directions. Grimes would soon become State Secretary to Governor Bamberger and, apparently, had some influence on the state legislature passing a Joint Memorial on March 13, 1919 urging the U.S. Congress to set aside Bryce’s Canyon as a national monument.

The Syretts

As the Forest service was first beginning to publicize the canyon in 1916, Reuben “Ruby” and Minnie Syrett were living in Panguitch but looking for a place to homestead. Settling on a location about 3-1/2 miles from what is now Sunset Point, they moved to the area in early May of 1916. By the end of the summer, Ruby and Minnie were inviting friends from Panguitch to come up and see the area’s scenery.

The years from 1916 to 1919 saw the Syrett’s adding to their homestead and splitting time between there, Escalante, and Tropic. As word began to spread and visitors arrived in ever increasing numbers, one Sunday in the spring or early summer of 1919 found a large group arriving from Salt Lake. The Syretts erected a large tent, served a noon meal, and later that afternoon, Ruby went back to

the ranch and returned with several beds. Ruby and Minnie would spend the rest of that summer accommodating visitors. In the spring of 1920 the Syretts built a permanent lodge, along with several cabins, that would soon be named Tourist’s Rest.



Tourist’s Rest in the 1920’s.

National Monument

Senator Reed Smoot of Utah introduced a bill in November of 1919 to establish Bryce as Utah National Park but the Department of the Interior's position was establishment of a national monument was a better idea. Senator Smoot would try again in 1921 however, by late 1922, he finally conceded that obtaining monument status would be the best way to proceed. Following meetings in December of 1922 and recommendations from both the Departments of Interior and Agriculture, on June 8, 1923 President Warren G.

Harding issued a proclamation establishing Bryce Canyon National Monument. Senator Smoot continued his pursuit of national park status for Bryce and his bill establishing Utah National Park was finally passed June 7, 1924. There was a stipulation, however, that it remain a national monument until such time as all lands within the boundaries became property of the U.S. Government. It would be four more years before this came to pass and from 1923 to 1928 the monument was managed by the forest service.

Union Pacific

Meanwhile, as the wheels of government turned in the early 1920's, the Union Pacific Railroad pursued their interest in developing the scenic attractions of Southern Utah and Northern Arizona. Bryce was a welcome addition to their plans which included Zion and Cedar Breaks along with the Grand Canyon's North Rim. The company's plans included a hotel and depot in Cedar City, lodges in the parks and monuments, and transportation services. In addition to facilities, there was also the problem of roads in the area. Negotiations between the State of Utah, the Federal Government, and Union Pacific, operating as Utah Parks Company, led to improvements in that regard. The Syretts were another issue and, while they did not actually own the land where Tourist's Rest was located, they did have a verbal agreement with the state and they did own water rights. Following several months of negotiation, the two parties came to agreement in late September, 1923 and the transfer of the Syrett's land, along with other adjoining land, was completed.

Even before acquiring the land, Union Pacific had contracted with Los Angeles architect Gilbert Stanley Underwood to design the lodges. Underwood first visited

Bryce Canyon in early May of 1923; it was on this visit that he selected the location for the building. Construction of the building began in the summer of 1924 and was opened for the first visitors in 1925. Expansion of the main lodge, plus construction of both standard and deluxe



A tour bus parked in front of the lodge in the late '20s.

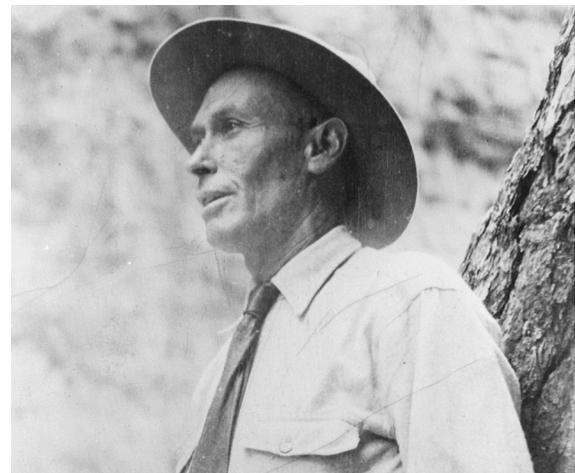
cabins, also designed by Underwood, continued for the next several years. By the fall of 1927 wings, which housed additional rooms and a curio store, and a recreation hall had been added to the lodge. By the same time there were 67 standard cabins and 5 deluxe cabins completed and, by 1929, an additional 10 deluxe cabins would be built.

Park Status

Some Utah authorities were not happy with the name "Utah National Park" as designated from the 1924 legislation creating the park. There were several reasons for this, including the fact that the monument had been going by the name Bryce Canyon, it had long been advertised by that name, and the name carried with it some local significance. Senator Smoot introduced a bill during the first session of the 70th Congress to change the name to Bryce Canyon National Park. Included in this bill were appropriations to acquire additional land and, with the addition of lands held by the state and Utah Parks Company, in 1928 Bryce Canyon National Park was officially established. Over the next few years more land was added to the park and by early 1931 the park had more than doubled in size from 14,480 acres to 30,560 acres. With land added in later years the park's current acreage stands at 35,835, the ninth smallest national park.

In the early years only one ranger, Maurice Cope, was permanently assigned to the park and he served only seasonally from 1929 through 1932. Cope became the park's first permanent ranger in 1933 and would remain at Bryce until 1943. Except for the years 1932 and 1933, when the effects of the Depression were worst, visitation grew steadily until the start of the Second World

War from 21,997 visitors in 1929 to 124,098 in 1941. In the 21st Century the park's annual visitation now exceeds 1.5 million, a dramatic change in a little over 80 years.



Maurice Cope, the first permanent ranger at Bryce Canyon National Park.



Gathering for a guided walk at Sunset Point, late '20s.