

Hermit Road Podcast – Grand Canyon National Park

January 30, 2009

This is Ranger Brian Gatlin with the Grand Canyon National Park Podcast for January 30, 2009.

A lot of important work has taken place in the park over the last year, but certainly the most impressive and important project was the rehabilitation of the Hermit Road. This was a huge project that began in last February, and concluded on time with the re-opening of the road on November 15, 2008.

Hermit Road was originally built by the Fred Harvey Company in 1913, and the first tourists to make the trip out to Hermit's Rest travelled by stagecoach. It wasn't until 1919 that cars were even allowed on the road. In 1934 the road was realigned to its modern path. This winding road along the canyon's rim continued to offer beautiful views and opportunities for hiking and wildlife viewing into the 21st century. However, the old, narrow road was no longer safe for park shuttle buses, especially when they shared the road with bicyclists and pedestrians. Over the years the road and many of the overlooks had deteriorated and were in need of maintenance.

So, last February, the park began a major construction project to rehabilitate and improve not just the road, but also its bus stops, overlooks, and the adjacent rim trail. The road itself was widened from 18 to 20 feet, all the way to 24 feet, maintaining its historic alignment but making it safer for buses and visitors. Improvements were made to over five miles of trails, including the construction of a three mile multi-use Greenway Trail from The Abyss to Hermit's Rest. The bus stop at Maricopa Point was relocated and a new, accessible path to the overlook was built, improving accessibility for visitors with mobility impairment. By relocating the bus stop and path, the park was also able to better preserve an extremely rare plant, the sentry milkvetch, which grows nearby. This endangered plant lives in a few places on the canyon rim and nowhere else in the world, so protecting it was another important outcome of the project. Now that it's all done, visitors can look forward to another century of great experiences on Hermit Road.

Hermit Road has always been a favorite area for visitors because there is something for everyone. If you'd like to drive out to the overlooks yourself, the road is open to private vehicles Dec 1 through Feb 28. For the rest of the year, access is by free shuttle bus only, which gives you the chance to let someone else do the driving. The buses are great when you use them in conjunction with the rim trail—you can get off at one stop, enjoy a scenic walk along the rim, and then get back on the bus at the next stop. Or if you feel like taking a longer walk, fill a backpack with food and water, then take the bus out to Hermit's Rest and walk the eight miles back to the Village. It's a mostly flat, easy walk with great views all the way.

If you enjoy bicycling, Hermit Road is probably the best place in the park. There is far less traffic out here because of the limitations on private vehicles. The three miles of new Greenway Trail are also a great addition for cyclists as well as hikers.

Whether you choose to drive, hike, bike, or ride a bus, there's a lot to see out on the Hermit Road. Visitors interested in some of the human history can stop at the Powell Memorial, which gives tribute to Major John Wesley Powell's exploration of Grand Canyon. At the end of the road, Hermit's Rest provides a welcome stop. This rugged stone structure, now a National Historic Landmark, was constructed by Mary Colter in 1914. It is an excellent of organic architecture, blending into its surroundings. The huge stone fireplace inside is a great place to warm up on a chilly day.

Wildlife is also common along the Hermit Road—deer and even bighorn sheep are seen regularly, and California Condors are seen through much of the year. In fact, they have nested in the cliffs far below, so keep your eyes open for this spectacular canyon resident.

And don't forget the views of the canyon itself. Hermit Road has some of the best Grand Canyon views you'll see anywhere. Just a few miles away in Grand Canyon Village, the steep canyon cliffs hide the Colorado River from view. But out on Hermit Road, once you get out to Hopi Point, the river comes into view, completing the picture. On a quiet day at Pima Point, you can hear the roar of the Colorado River as it crashes through Granite Rapid.

Many people choose to begin or end their day on the Hermit Road, taking in a spectacular Grand Canyon sunrise or sunset. Whenever you choose to visit, you'll find something to enjoy. And with the new improvements, this is a great time to get out there.

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