

Petrified Forest

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Petrified Forest National Park
Arizona

History



Historic Stage Stop



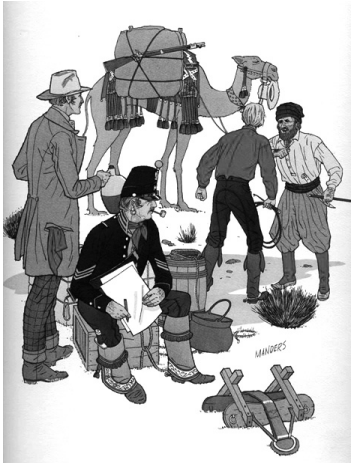
Lt. Amiel Weeks Whipple

December 2—Camp 76...Quite a forest of petrified trees was discovered to-day...They are converted into beautiful specimens of variegated jasper. One trunk was measured ten feet in diameter, and more than one hundred feet in length....

Lieutenant Amiel Weeks Whipple, 1853

Petrified Forest is a surprising country. The vast grasslands and rolling clay badlands of the Painted Desert seem deceptively simple, but the history of the region is complex. Crossed by the invisible line of the 35th Parallel, Petrified Forest is part of a natural corridor, used by prehistoric people ten thousand years ago and by travelers today. Take a moment to explore the history of Petrified Forest and perhaps discover your own connection to this fascinating place.

Explorers and Pathfinders



Beale's camels

Standing at the edge of a colorful sea of badlands and mesas, a Spanish explorer named the region El Desierto Pintado—the Painted Desert. No mention was made of petrified wood, but the Spanish of the 16th through 18th centuries were focused on finding routes between their colonies along the Rio Grande and the Pacific Coast. Within Petrified Forest National Park, Spanish inscriptions have been discovered from the late 1800s, descendants of some of the earliest non-American Indian settlers in the region.

Routes continued to be explored after the Southwest became part of U.S. territories in the mid-1800s. U.S. Army Lt. Amiel Whipple, surveying for a route along the 35th Parallel passed down a broad sandy wash in the red badlands of the Painted Desert. Impressed with the deposits of petrified wood visible along the banks, Whipple named it Lithodendron (“stone tree”) Creek, the large wash that bisects the Wilderness Area of the park today.

One of the strangest sights at the edge of the Painted Desert must have been a camel caravan. An experienced explorer, E. F. Beale was hired by the US Government as a civilian contractor to build a wagon road along the 35th Parallel. Between 1857 and 1860, Beale made several trips from his ranch at Fort Tejon, California, building and improving the road. On his first journey, Beale was in charge of a government experiment in desert transport that included camels and their drivers. While Beale became convinced of the camels’ value, the government declared the experiment a failure. The wagon road lives on, still visible in spots across the Southwest, part of which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

From Trails to Rails and Roads



Homesteaders and train trestle

Did you know that many of you have been following the 35th Parallel? Interstate 40 is only the most recent thoroughfare along this route. In the late 1800s, settlers and private stage companies followed this ancient corridor. Homesteaders developed ranches that took advantage of the rich grasslands that would forever after bear the mark of grazing. In 1884, the *Holbrook Times* noted: “...The whole northern portion of the territory seems to be undergoing a great change...Our plains are stocked with thousands of cattle, horses and sheep...” Cattle would graze in Petrified Forest until the mid-1900s and ranches are some of the park’s best neighbors.

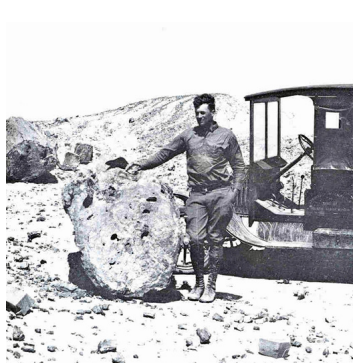
While traveling through the park, you will see a bridge arching over a long stretch of railroad. The Atlantic and Pacific Railroad laid lines in this region in the early 1880s, sparking the founding of many northern Arizona towns, including Holbrook to the west. Adamana was the nearest town attached to what was then called the Chalcedony Forest, providing a train station, hotels, and tours. The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway took over the line, eventually becoming today’s Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway. While the heyday of tourist travel by train is gone, still more than sixty trains a day pass through the park.



National Old Trails Highway

The heyday of another travel line is long past as well, that of Route 66 which was decommissioned in 1985. Petrified Forest is the only national park that preserves a section of the famous road within its boundaries, now mostly just a whisper through the grasses. Route 66 was developed from part of the original transcontinental road, the National Old Trails Highway, which connected many historic trails from the East to the West Coasts. Route 66 is better known perhaps due to songs and tales of the romance of the road. That romance still continues for many as they follow Interstate 40 across the continent, exploring such places as Petrified Forest National Park.

Researchers' Paradise



Paleontologist Charles Camp

Imagine being one of the first scientists to view the landscape. Geologist Jules Marcou was a member of the Whipple Expedition of 1853. He was the first to note that the trees were from the Triassic—"We are in the middle part of the Trias." In 1899, paleobotanist Lester Frank Ward came to study this natural phenomenon. His report to the U.S. Geological Survey extolled the abundance, beauty, and especially the scientific worth of the petrified wood and thus promoted the establishment of a park.

In the vast collection of fossils at the Museum of Paleontology at the University of California at Berkeley, there is a phytosaur fossil skull with odd burn marks, discovered near Blue Mesa by Ynez Mexia in 1919. On its journey back to the University, the skull was mistaken as trash, barely escaping the hotel garbage incinerators at the Grand Canyon. Mexia's collection of bones piqued the interest of Miss Annie Alexander, founder of the Museum. In 1921, Miss Alexander and her long-time companion, Miss Louise Kellogg, visited Blue Forest, collecting the remainder of the phytosaur skull as well

as other specimens. Their pioneering work came to the attention of paleontologist Charles Camp, who oversaw excavations over the next decade at sites that continue to yield valuable information about Late Triassic life.

At the beginning of the 1900s, archeologist Walter Hough collected artifacts and conducted excavations as part of the first professional archeological expedition in the area. He identified the importance of sites such as Puerco Pueblo. The Civil Works Administration funded surveys of sites in Petrified Forest during the 1930s by archeologists H. P. Mera and C.B. Cosgrove. These scientific pioneers opened the region for many generations of researchers.

Preserve and Protect



First superintendent Charles "White Mountain" Smith and wife, writer Dama Margaret Smith

With the influx of tourist and commercial interest in the petrified wood during the late 19th century, residents of the region became concerned that this unique resource might disappear. In 1895, the Arizona Territory legislature petitioned Congress for the area to be a national park, a failure but was still a move towards preservation.

On June 8, 1906, the Antiquities Act was signed by President Theodore Roosevelt, to preserve and protect places of scientific importance. Petrified Forest was one of the first places set aside as a national monument through the use of this Act on December 8, 1906.

Between 1934 and 1942, the Civilian Conservation Corps helped improve the park, working on such projects as building facilities, roads, and trails. During this time, a section of the red part of the Painted Desert was added to the park. Petrified Forest continued to evolve over the years, boundaries changing, lands added. In 1962, Petrified Forest was designated a national park.

With the signing of the Wilderness Act by President Lyndon B. Johnson on September 3, 1964, the National Wilderness Preservation System was established. Six years later, one of the first wilderness areas in the National Park System was designated within Petrified Forest National Park. Wilderness is a place where natural processes are the primary influences and human activity is limited.

On December 3, 2004, President George W. Bush signed the bill authorizing expanded boundaries for Petrified Forest National Park. As funds are available, the expansion will enlarge the park from 93,533 acres to approximately 218,533 acres, an increase of 125,000 acres. These new lands will provide more opportunities for exploration and discovery for future generations.