

# Creation of Zion National Park



*Postage stamp issued in 1934 recognizing Zion National Park, as part of a National Park commemorative stamp series.*

“In an instant, there flashed before us a scene never to be forgotten. In coming time it will, I believe, take rank with a very small number of spectacles each of which will, in its own way, be regarded as the most exquisite of its kind which the world discloses. The scene before us was the Temples and Towers of the Virgin.” Thus prophetically wrote Captain Clarence E. Dutton of the U. S. Geological Survey in a report published in the year 1880. . . .

Few have seen Zion as Clarence Dutton saw it. From a high pass, in late afternoon, with the sun on his left, he looked into that vast panorama of the Vermillion Cliffs of Zion and Parunuweap and those flanking the Great West Canyon as well – a twenty mile stretch in one sweeping view. The setting sun cast shadows that made the turrets and towers stand out in bold relief, while the light reflected from one wall upon another intensified the tints and shades of the reds

until they stood out in striking contrast with the vivid green of the vegetation and the higher cliffs. No wonder the cold scientist broke down and described in emotional terms this superb panorama. . . .

The national conservation program inaugurated by President Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot produced a bill (June 8, 1906) empowering the president to set aside certain lands particularly valuable for scenic, scientific or historic purposes, as national monuments. Many were created during the next few years and among them was the Mukuntuweap National Monument.

During the summer of 1908, Leo A. Snow of St. George, a United States Deputy Surveyor, was detailed to survey in southern Utah, Township 40 South, Range 10 West from Salt Lake City. The

party, of which the present writer [Angus M. Woodbury] was a member, in executing the survey covered the upper part of the Zion gorge. Triangulation was used in measuring the gorge from the east to west. When the report and map were submitted that part of the canyon was described as unsurveyable. In his report, Snow stated that from a certain place (now Observation Point):

A view can be had of this canyon surpassed only by a similar view of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. At intervals along the west side of the canyon streams of various sizes rush over the edge of the chasm forming water falls from 800 to 2,000 feet high. The stream in the bottom of the canyon appears as a silver ribbon winding its way among the undergrowth and occasionally disappearing from view. **In my opinion this canyon should be set apart by the government as a national park.**

The report was dispatched to Washington, June 25, 1909. A little more than a month later, July 31, the Acting Secretary of the Interior recommended to the President the creation of the Mukuntuweap National Monument. President Taft signed the proclamation on the same day. . . .

The opening of the scenic areas of southern Utah and northern Arizona to the touring public is largely a story of highways. . . .

At the beginning of the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a few individuals here and there in the state were beginning to grasp the potentialities of southern Utah as a scenic mecca. Throughout the United States, agitation for better roads gained ground as the automobile assumed a larger place in our national consciousness. . . .

This movement led to the establishment in 1909 of the Utah State Road Commission, empowered to develop state roads and with the avowed intention to build a two million dollar highway through the entire state from Logan to St. George. . . .

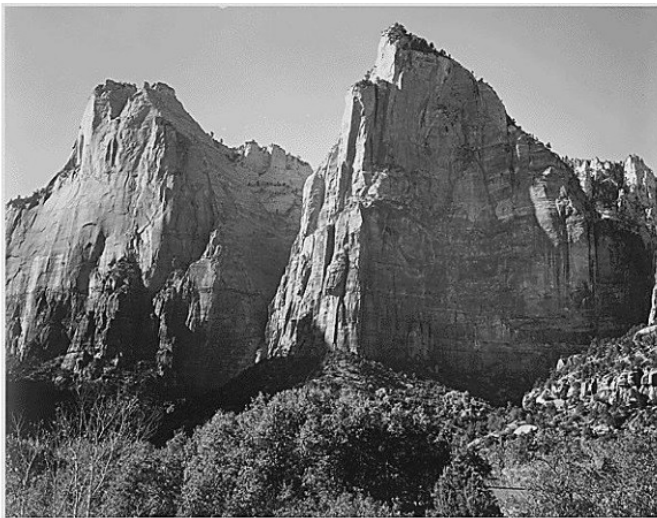
Occasional trips into the scenic southland continued, some primarily for enjoyment, others for publicity or promotional purposes, all of which served to focus public attention more and more on the area. Public pressure was brought to bear not only on the road commission, but also on the governor and eventually on the Federal government.

On the occasion of Governor Spry's first visit to Zion in October, 1913, the people along the Virgin River declared a holiday and accompanied his party almost en masse into Zion, where a picnic was enjoyed at the foot of the cable. To thrill the governor, a man was lifted to the top of the cliffs on the cable and brought back a few minutes later. The party rode horseback into the Narrows and was much impressed by the experience. Governor Spry was thoroughly convinced of the importance of national recognition and thereafter earnestly pressed for its realization.

The U. S. National Park Service was authorized by Congressional Act of August 25, 1916, but it was not actually established until May, 1917. The bill, as passed, created the National Park Service "To promote and regulate the use of the Federal Areas known as National Parks, Monuments and Reservations by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purposes of said parks, monuments and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein, and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

Frederick Vining Fisher, a Methodist minister of Ogden, Utah, came to Salt Lake City in 1915 to lecture and show slides of California to advertise the Panama Pacific International Exposition. He had ministered in Ogden for some years prior to 1912, but his attention had never been called to Zion

Canyon. One day at lunch at the University of Utah, a student said to him, "Mr. Fisher, your pictures last night were fine, but you have not seen the best." Surprised, Fisher then wormed the story of Zion Canyon out of the lad. He was at once eager to visit the canyon, and in September 1916, while traveling to St. George with Apostle Anthony W. Ivins of the Latter-day Saints Church to attend a local conference, visited the scenic area. . . .



*Illustration 1: Court of the Patriarchs, Photograph by Ansel Adams, National Archives Identifier 520019.*

Bishop David Hirschi's son, Claud, took Fisher and a friend, Bingham, up Zion Canyon where Fisher got the greatest thrill of his life. They decided to name the

scenic points as they went along. Three peaks that Hirschi thought looked like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they called the **Three Patriarchs**. The boys of the party stopped at the big loop in the river and looked at the pillars of rock on the inside point. When Fisher asked why they were delaying, the boys replied they were waiting for an organist to play the **Great Organ**. They coined several other names not now in use, but after reaching the Narrows and starting back, Hirschi espied a great white precipice gleaming in the afternoon sun, framed by the pass between **Angel's Landing** and the **Great Organ**. He said, "Oh, Doctor, look quick, what is that?" Overwhelmed, Fisher replied, "Never have I seen such a sight before. It is by all odds America's masterpiece. Boys, I have looked for this mountain all my life but I never expected to find it in this world. This mountain is the **Great White Throne**. (From a letter of Frederick Vining Fisher to Angus M. Woodbury)

Douglas White, zealous promoter of Utah's scenic riches, urged Albright [Horace M. Albright, a youthful assistant to Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane] to come west and visit Zion Canyon with him in the summer of 1917. In September, he met him in Los Angeles and they went to Lund, Utah, by train and over to Cedar City by auto, where they met Road Commissioner Henry W. Lunt and Mr. R. A. Thorley, a Cedar City stockman. The next morning Albright, White and Thorley, in a touring car driven by Chauncey Parry, started south over the "perfectly terrible roads" and reached the Wylie Camp in Zion in the afternoon. At Rockville, they met David Hirschi, bishop of the village. The next day, in the words of Albright:

"We went as far up Mukuntuweap Canyon as possible. We watched the cable operate from the rim of Zion to the floor. We hiked through to the Narrows and back again. That night we saw a full moon light up the canyon and the next morning I was up early enough to see the sunlight creep down from the top of the domes and spires to the valley floor. I was overwhelmed by the loveliness of the valley and the beauty of the canyon walls and was sure that the area was of national park caliber."

Albright faced two troublesome local problems: elimination of grazing in the canyon and keeping narrow-tired wagons off the new road. He conferred with Bishop Hirschi, who suggested a conference with the local people concerned. At the conference, Albright recorded:

“ . . . cooperation of the local people was cheerfully extended, and the orders were issued soon after and were generally obeyed, with the result that the grazing was stopped and the shrubs and wild flowers in the canyon began to come back. I shall always remember with keenest delight my early association with those good Mormon people, who, without knowing what a national park was, cooperated so fully in executing orders that brought them real hardship.”

From Salt Lake City Albright wired Director Mather [soon to be Director of the newly created National Park Service], who was still in California and had not yet assumed office, urging him to visit southern Utah, and giving him a glowing account of what he had seen. Mather did not reply at once but later wrote that he thought Albright must have fallen into the hands of some chamber of commerce directors or had been given some very potent drink, for he had never heard of such a country and found it difficult to believe it existed.

During the next winter in Washington, D. C., Albright toyed with the idea of changing the name of the monument from Mukuntuweap to Zion and was urged to do so by Douglas White. Secretary Lane approved and the Utah congressional delegation concurred. Albright prepared a proclamation changing the name and enlarging the monument to one hundred and twenty square miles, which President Wilson signed March 18, 1918. Other Utah scenic areas, including Cedar Breaks, Bryce Canyon and Wayne Wonderland [Capitol Reef] all profited by the publicity accorded Zion and the Grand Canyon. . . .

Mather and Albright were both in the West during the summer of 1919, but neither had opportunity to visit southern Utah. However, Albright had conferred with Senator Smoot several times on the question of creating Zion Canyon a national park. Mather finally yielded to their persuasion even though he had not yet seen it. Albright went ahead with plans, drafted legislation, prepared reports and presented arguments to the congressional committees. Boundary lines of the park were based upon information furnished by Richard A. Thorley of Cedar City and Leo A. Snow of St. George.

Smoot had previously introduced a bill in the Senate (S. B. 8282) to change the name of Mukuntuweap National Monument to Little Zion National Park, but no action was taken. On May 20, 1919 he introduced another bill (S. B. 425, Vol. 58:9640) to establish the Zion National Park in the State of Utah. It passed the Senate a month later and was sent to the Houe Committee on Public

Lands the next day. It was reported in the House August 26, after which amendments delayed its passage until October 6. The bill was finally signed in the House, November 15, and in the Senate, November 19, 1919, and sent to the President, who signed it that same day.

Mather was in Denver at the time of its passage, attending a conference of national park superintendents, at which Walter Ruesch was also present as custodian of Zion National Monument. When word reached him, Mather immediately decided to make his long delayed visit to Zion. His enthusiasm was immediate and thereafter he gave personal attention to its affairs.

The dedication took place September 15, 1920 in the presence of a large assembly. St. George and Cedar City bands furnished music. Speakers included Director Mather, Senator Reed Smoot, ex-Governor William Spry, C. Clarence Neslen, mayor of Salt Lake City, and Heber J. Grant, president of the Mormon Church, representing Governor Simon Bamberger. Mather reviewed the history of the Park, Mayor Neslen foretold its future, and other speakers promised support for its development.

Travel into Zion was slowly increasing. The number of people entering in 1920 nearly doubled that of the previous year (from 1,914 to 3,692). By 1930 it had increased to more than 55,000 and for a decade thereafter registered proportionate gains.

**(*A History of Southern Utah and Its National Parks*, by Angus M. Woodbury, p. 185-203.)**

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