

Visit of U.S. President Warren G. Harding to Zion National Park, 1923

President Warren G. Harding's visit to southern Utah was part of a broader tour of the western United States designed to bring him "closer to the people and their conditions." The presidential train arrived in Utah on June 26, 1923. He spent the day in Ogden and Salt Lake. Then the train brought his party down to Cedar City overnight via the newly opened rail spur from Lund to Cedar City.

On the morning of June 27, the delegation continued south in thirty-two highly polished cars furnished by Cedar City residents. The president's entourage included Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work, Secretary of Agriculture Henry C. Wallace, Secretary of Commerce Herbert C. Hoover, and all of their wives. Speaker of the House of Representatives Frederick H. Gillett and U.S. Navy Admiral Hugh Rodman were also in attendance, along with about 70 other public officials and newspaper reporters. Utah officials included Governor Mabey, President Heber J. Grant, and Senator Reed Smoot.

All along the route the official entourage passed scores of friendly southern Utahns attracted by the chance to see the country's president in person.

In Toquerville townsfolk had spent much of the previous night carrying buckets of water to sprinkle the three-quarters of a mile of road that dissected their town in order to prevent any dust from stirring when the president's car passed over it. Fortunately, the road remained dust free and, as planned, the presidential caravan stopped in Toquerville for a rest, giving Harding a chance to address the pioneers of that area. As he spoke, local residents showed their appreciation for the



U.S. President Warren G. Harding on Horseback in Zion Canyon, June 1923.

honor of having the president of the United States in their town by loading each official car in the entourage with a brimming basket of prize Dixie fruit.

After winding through several other small towns the group finally arrived in Zion Canyon where they found a number of the region's best horses waiting. President Harding donned leather chaps, tied a kerchief around his neck, and, joined by Heber J. Grant, Governor Charles R. Mabey, Senator Reed Smoot, and other dignitaries, proceeded on horseback up the scenic canyon.

After enjoying the beauty of southern Utah, the party returned to Cedar City where Mrs. Harding told the people how thoroughly she had enjoyed the day: "I am glad I came . . . I would not have missed this trip for anything."

Pres. Harding made the following speech:

I have today viewed the greatest creations of the Almighty in the majestic natural wonders of Zion National Park. It has inspired me with a deeper religious conviction.

I am acquainted with pioneer stock. It has made the United States. By the difference between the arid and cultivated sections I can read the story of your work. To you men and women who came with your families in covered wagons into this country when the water still flowed through its natural gorges, the nation owes a debt of gratitude. I am the first President of the United States to come and express that gratitude but I feel sure when I tell of this trip to my successors all future Presidents will come to visit this country of wonders.

The presidential party then board its train and headed for its next scenic destination, Yellowstone National Park, followed by Yosemite and Alaska. President Harding never returned home from this trip. On his way back from Alaska, he died suddenly in San Fransisco on August 2, 1923.

(Washington County Historical Society Website, www.wchsutah.org/miscellaneous/warren-g-harding.php)

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