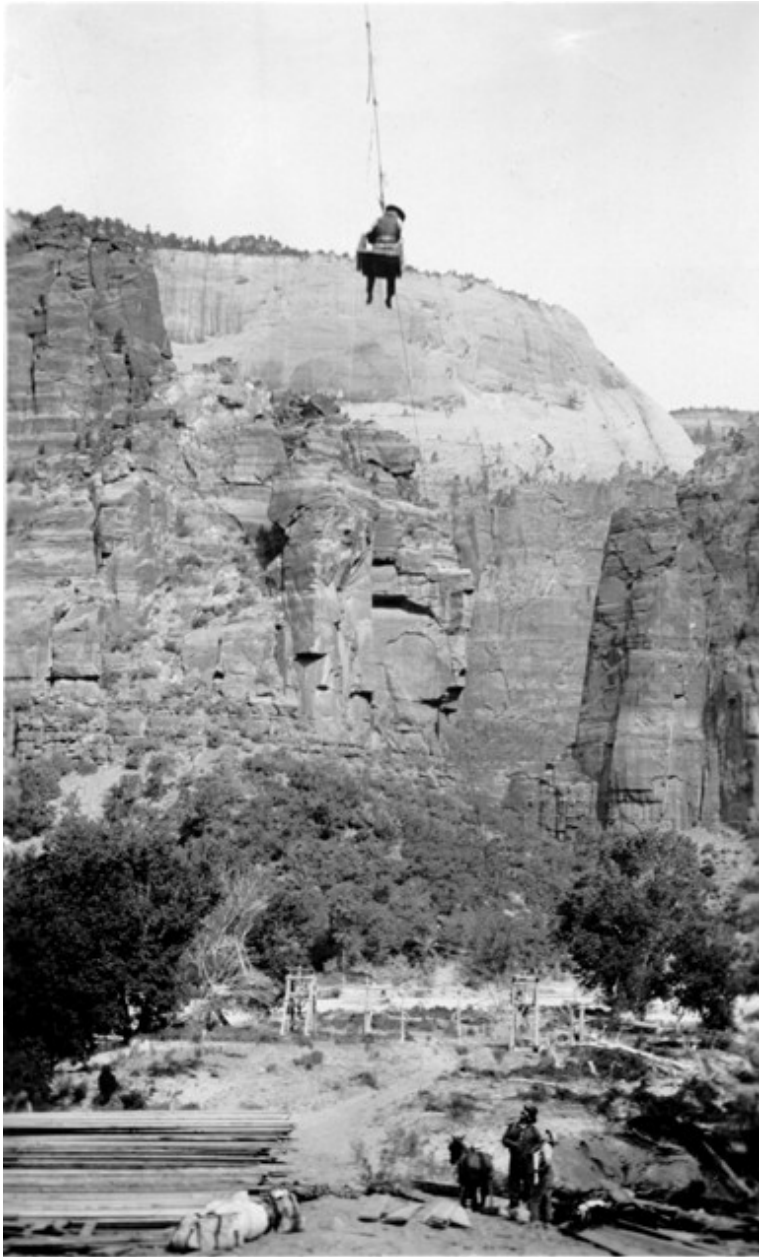


## **THE CABLE AT CABLE MOUNTAIN**

(From ***A History of Southern Utah and its National Parks***, by Angus M. Woodbury, p. 161-164)



***Riding the cable at Zion.***

***SUU Special Collections Photo***

The early settlers of Rockville, needing timber from the mountains, had explored the probabilities of a road through the canyon without success. James H. Jennings recalls hearing Elijah Newman, an early settler of Rockville, tell that a team could be driven from the head of Parowan Canyon over Cedar Mountain to the rim of Zion Canyon and that he believed that some day a way would be found through the cliffs so that timber could be hauled down from the mountain.

Brigham Young himself had encouraged the idea on one of his trips to the upper Virgin, probably in 1863. It is related that when the settlers were bemoaning the lack of timber for flooring their cabins, he stated in public meeting that the day would come when hundreds of thousands of feet of lumber would be brought down the canyon. The wise ones shook their heads and remarked that their leader had missed it this time.

During the early [1870s] the mail from St. George to Kanab was routed via Shunesburg. It was lifted over the 1,500 foot cliff at the head of Shunesburg canyon on wires<sup>1</sup> arranged in such a way that the man at the top bringing the mail from Kanab could exchange with the man below, carrying it down the river. This short-cut saved a day's travel over the road via Pipe Springs and the Arizona Strip.

It was not until the new century had dawned, however, that young David Flanigan, who was but a small boy in the days of the Shunesburg wire-pulley apparatus, conceived the idea of lowering lumber over the cliffs by means of cables. As a lad of 15, in the spring of 1888, he and three other boys hunting on the East Rim of Zion had seen a large grove of yellow pine sawtimber and had stood at the top of the cliff later known as Cable Mountain, where the precipice appeared to reach almost to the floor of the canyon. The problem of lumber remained as acute then as it was in the days of his parents.

Ten years later, needing lumber for himself, he was forced to go to the Trumbull or Kaibab mountains, a trip requiring a full week. The advantage of obtaining lumber nearer home on the rim of Zion thus impressed itself upon him. He advocated the idea of lowering it on a cable but found no supporters. Convinced of the practical wisdom of the idea, he undertook the work alone in 1900. He bought 50,000 feet of wire and stretched it around pulleys and drums at top and bottom making a circular series, half of which had three wires, and half five. The five-ply half was to run around the drum where the weight would be greatest.

After two or three years of experimenting with pulleys and wire tension, he finally perfected his device. To cut the timber, he bought an old saw-mill in the summer or fall of 1904. Thus Flanigan's ingenuity made it possible for vast quantities of lumber to go down Zion Canyon. By Christmas, 1906, two hundred thousand feet of sawed lumber had actually been lowered on his cable.

In 1906 Flanigan sold out to Alfred P. Stout<sup>2</sup> and O. D. Gifford. They replaced his wire cable with a heavier twisted rope cable, which served for many years and over which millions of feet of lumber were lowered into the canyon and hauled to the settlements further

<sup>1</sup>Interview with B. A. Riggs near Kanab, Utah, August 11, 1931.

<sup>2</sup>Interview with Mrs. Mary Jane Stout at Hurricane, Utah, August 25, 1933.

downstream. Stout established a shingle mill in Zion Canyon about a quarter of a mile below the cable and near the foot of the northeast corner of the Great White Throne. At first, large cottonwood logs were cut for shingles, but as these proved of inferior quality, yellow pine logs were supplied via cable. The shingle mill was washed away by floods two years later.

A sad accident occurred at the top of the cable on July 28, 1908. A party of young people vacationing on the east rim went over to see the cable operate from the top. Three of them were standing in the box at the edge, directly under the cable, looking into the depths of the canyon, when a bolt of lightning struck the cable, killing Thornton Hepworth, Jr., and stunning Clarinda Langston and Lionel Stout. Miss Langston fell limp on the edge of the box where she was in imminent danger of plummeting down the cliff. Miss Elza Stout, uninjured nearby, rescued her from the precarious position, but before assistance could be rendered him, a second bolt struck the wire and killed Lionel Stout. Miss Langston recovered, but the bodies of the two boys were lowered into the canyon over the cable.

It was more than a year later when people started to "ride the cable." About the middle of September, 1910, soon after Zion had been proclaimed a national monument, some members of Scott P. Stewart's surveying party visited the top of the cable. They were told that a dog had been sent up from below and that he was nearly crazy when he reached the top. Quinby Stewart, a fearless youth, told them that if they would bring some watermelons up to the foot, he would go down on the cable and help eat them. True to his word, when the melons arrived he climbed on a load of lumber ready to be lowered, and holding to the cable, rode safely to the bottom. It was a swift flight of two minutes, and to a young man of his disposition a rousing thrill. Others followed suit, and after eating the melons, rode back to the top in the empty cage.

Riding the cable proved an attraction for those gifted with strong nerves. At a later date, Frank Petty came to operate the sawmill at the top of the cliff. He was a large man, weighing nearly 300 pounds, too heavy to travel comfortably up and down the trails, and the road around the Arizona strip to his home in Rockville being too long for convenience, he took to riding the cable. On one occasion, as he started down, the lumber on which he was riding struck the top of the cliff and loosened the chain holding one end of the load. His son Frank, operating the brakes at the top, seeing the mishap, applied the brakes just in time to prevent his father from falling down the face of the 1,800 foot declivity. With a few inches of the lumber still clinging to the edge and his father paralyzed with fear and afraid to move for fear of jarring it loose, Frank climbed underneath and re-fastened the chain. With a sigh of relief, he then lowered his father in safety to the bottom.

<a href="#">Zion</a>	<a href="#">Exploring</a>	<a href="#">Natives</a>	<a href="#">Pioneers</a>	<a href="#">Towns</a>	<a href="#">Resources</a>	<a href="#">Arts</a>	<a href="#">History</a>	<a href="#">Photos</a>	<a href="#">Maps</a>
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