

Historical Threads

The Brooklyn Eagle Tour Comes to Cedar City

by Jay M. Jones

In June of 1921, the first large group of tourists to visit Zion National Park stayed in Cedar City. At the time, the Hotel El Escalante was being built, the nearest passenger railroad service was in Lund, 30 miles to the northwest, the nation's incomplete highway system was in its infancy and Zion National Park was less than two years old.

The Brooklyn Daily Eagle newspaper organized the tour, and reported in their 24 June 1921 edition: "At the Park they were greeted by Walter Reusch, Park superintendent, and W. W. Wylie, in charge of the camp. Two days were spent among the majestic crags and canyons of the Park exploring places hitherto unvisited by tourists. In honor of the expedition a towering precipice near the entrance was named Eagle Crag."

The Brooklyn Daily Eagle was not new to organizing and publicizing great tours to world's fairs, expositions, and national parks.

The 1921 tour was headed to Hawaii for the dedication of the Hawaiian National Park, which was then the nation's newest national park. A visit to Zion was also on their schedule, as were visits to Crater Lake, Mt. Rainer, and Glacier National Parks.

Preparations for the tour had been underway for months. In January 1921 the Iron County Record reported that Randall L. Jones had received a letter requesting items for the Brooklyn Daily Eagle. "We would like to have several more copies of the Iron County Record of Sept. 27th, 1918. (Giving cuts and description of Cedar Breaks) Also, could we obtain the cuts used in that issue to forward to Mr. Hendricks to be used in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle? They will be returned promptly. Can you advise present address of Mr. William Flanigan mentioned in the Record issue of Sept 27th, 1918?"

The 27 September 1918 issue of the Iron County Record had published two full pages of photos and descriptions of Cedar Breaks and Cedar Canyon. The photos were taken by R. D. Adams with William Flanigan as the guide. Flanigan had discovered Flanigan's Arch a few years before, and had a deep knowledge of Cedar Canyon, Cedar Breaks and Zion, including the Zion Narrows.

Quoting from Brooklyn Daily Eagle newspaper, Sunday 24 April 1921: "Zion National Park and Cedar Canyon are said by many observers to equal the Grand Canyon in majesty and to surpass it in coloring. This region is almost unknown to American travelers, and only a handful of Eastern tourists have ever seen some of the Utah districts to be visited by The Eagle tourists. The co-operation of Utah citizens and officials will make it possible to avoid the hardships usually incident to travel in undeveloped regions."

Cedar City leaders had been lobbying for a railroad spur into town, allowing tourists to connect with the Salt Lake to Los Angeles railroad main line at Lund. Recognizing the need for a large hotel to accommodate the anticipated tourists, the El Escalante Hotel was under construction. With the Brooklyn Eagle tour expected to furnish 135 guests, Cedar City officials asked local residents to be ready to offer their homes as lodging to the visitors.

As it turned out, the tour got off to a near disastrous start when the "Buckeye State", an ocean-liner headed out of Baltimore to Los Angeles via the Panama Canal, experienced a disabling fire in the engine room and had to be towed back to port. The decision was made to continue the tour to the west via railroad, but the number of guests to arrive in Cedar City and Zion was only 26 – still a significant number for Southern Utah at the time.

The reviews of the visit to Southern Utah published in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle were enthusiastic. From the 3 July 1921 edition: "Zion Park was a revelation to the veteran travelers in the party. Adjectives were piled on adjectives in a vain attempt to convey the depth of the impression made by the canyon's rugged yet intimate beauty."

One member of the tour group, Alvah Davison, mentioned other places he had visited, including the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone and Yosemite. "And then I came to Zion, and I found there was more to be seen. How can I describe the scenes of this wonderful region which even the recording angel would find it hard to describe?"

“These are not mountains. They are the castles of the saints that have passed away. Surely this is the city where the walls are of jasper. At its base there is a shimmering stream typifying the fount of eternal salvation. . . . The words of ‘The Holy City’ come to me as I behold this place set aside by God to make of us better men and better women. To me Zion Park is the gem of the known universe.”

The Brooklyn Eagle continued: “This spirit of reverential sanctity was reflected in every member of the party.”

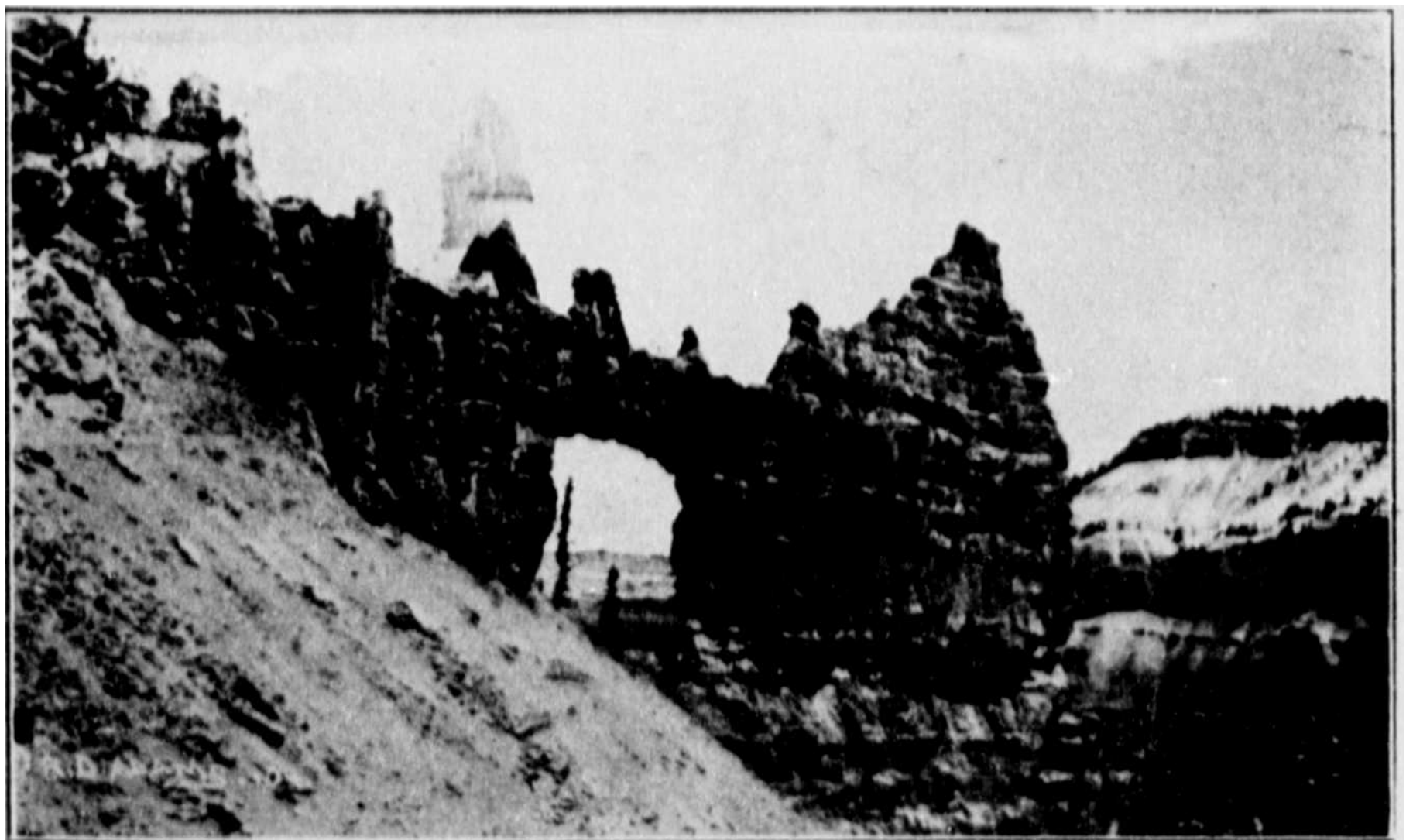
The 8 July 1921 edition of the Iron County Record contained a thank you note from members of the Brooklyn Eagle tour: “In appreciation of the many courtesies extended to the Brooklyn Eagle tourists during their stay at Cedar City, and appreciating fully the hospitality of your Commercial Club, the tourists desire to express in concrete form the pleasures which they experienced in their short visit to your city. We are enclosing to you our check for \$125.00, and request that you use this to purchase a suitable memorial to be placed in the Cedar City Hotel when completed.”

The railroad came to Cedar City in 1923. The Hotel El Escalante was completed in 1924 and served tourists for many years.

In 1930 a sculpted marker commemorating the Dominguez-Escalante expedition was placed outside Hotel El Escalante on the corner of 200 North and Main Street, funded in part by the generous contribution of the Brooklyn Eagle tourists, the first large group of tourists to visit Cedar City.

After the tour had returned from the dedication of the Hawaiian National Park and had visited Crater Lake and Mt. Rainier National Parks, H. V. Kaltenborn, manager of the tour, told an audience in Spokane, Washington:

“You of the Western United States best exemplify the spirit of true Americanism. What you have shown us will send us back to the East with a fresh enthusiasm and vigor to confront problems that seem so gloomy, due to our closer contact with pessimistic Europe. (World War I had concluded less than 3 years before.) “You have drawn a vigor from the great hills and vast open plains that surround you that speaks a message of hope for the future of our nation.”



THE HOLE IN THE WALL—CEDAR BREAKS

A photo by R. D. Adams, published in the 27 September 1918 edition of the Iron County Record, showing one of the arches at Cedar Breaks.



AMERICAN SPHINX—CEDAR BREAKS

Photo by R. D. Adams, from the 27 September 1918 edition of the Iron County Record.

Description includes: "By what caprice of Dame Nature, during the ages of violence and shock accompanying the eruptive period in this district a huge boulder, weighing many tons, supported by only a slender neck of rock, and christened the American Sphinx, could have been left balanced and standing in this position through the ages, is a riddle for geologists to solve and explain. To the casual observer it appears ready to fall at any moment and sight seers passing near it would do so with bated breath."



Marker of the Dominguez-Escalante Expedition, originally located near the Hotel El Escalante at 200 North Main Street in Cedar City, partially funded by donations of members of the Brooklyn Eagle Tour of 1921.