

BATES WILSON

The 'Father of Canyonlands NP'...in his own words

Fifteen years before Bates Wilson became the first Superintendent of Canyonlands National Park, he went to work at Arches in that same capacity. The 50s were years of dramatic change in Southeast Utah; the uranium boom brought thousands of prospectors and fortune hunters here. From 1949 to 1962, Bates filed monthly reports on life at Arches, and through these reports can be found the history of that time. What follows are excerpts from those reports:



April 1949

General: On April 11 Russell Mahan left for permanent duty as Superintendent of Colorado National Monument, leaving Ranger Earl Worthington in charge of this area. On April 19 I arrived from El Morro and am just recovering from the confusion and headache of moving.

Weather: Cold raid fell for a solid week, March 27 through April 1, and during the latter part of April we have had three days of high winds. For these thick-blooded guys from El Morro the weather seems quite hot at present, but I understand it is not unusual.

October, 1949

Weather: We have enjoyed warm sunny days and cool

nights until winter dropped suddenly out of the sky on October 17 in the form of cold rain and snow which raised the Colorado River two feet at the Moab Bridge. Court House Wash ran for three days making it necessary to close the entrance road. One visitor who didn't believe in signs sank deep in the quick sand and abandoned his car when the water started running in the window.

Special Visitors: Mr. John Ford, motion picture director for Argosy Productions, arrived in Moab October 4 to look over a location for the making of a picture in this area. He and his business manager, Mr. Farrell, spent three days around Moab and were shown through the monument. They said that their biggest problem would be making a choice of scenery and not finding it. On or two shots will be made in the monument.

I took four days leave and worked as an extra in John Ford's current picture, Rio Bravo. I signed up as a calvary man, but much to the disgust of my young son, I found myself, the first day, with a calico dress over my blue & gold uniform riding in a covered wagon.

June, 1950

Personnel: Ranger Worthington took annual leave May 28 through June 2 in order to take care of personal business in Nephi, Utah. I took four days leave and worked as an extra in John Ford's current picture, Rio Bravo. I signed up as a calvary man, but much to the disgust of my young son, I found myself, the first day, with a calico dress over my blue & gold uniform riding in a covered wagon.

July, 1953

Interpretive Devices: The Cove Nature Trail is in extremely poor condition.

Due to the dry weather, no rain this year, the Green Ephedra is brown and all specimens are poor. The Whipple Fish Hook Cactus has been transplanted several times, but within a few days it disappears. Evidently some people take the name of the cactus literally and hook on to it. The Galleta, Needle-and-Thread and Indian Rice grasses are still dormant and most of these specimens have been tramped out or covered with blowing sand. Even the Rabbitbrush is in sad shape. The stakes have been moved to better specimens but it is doubtful that the common person can tell one type of brown, probably dead, grass from the other.

April, 1954

Commercial Power: Commercial electricity for Arches was delayed for another 30 days pending the development of an AEC Uranium Ore sampling plant 1/2 mile below our headquarters. Mr. Charles Steen has just announced that the Utex Corp. and other interests are going to build a 4 1/2 million dollar Uranium processing plant in the same area. This should put the AEC in business; one large sub-station will probably be built to serve the entire operation and power will be underlined back to us. This should cut down on the initial cost of the line since we do not have to pay for sub-station.

June, 1954

Stabilization of Delicate Arch: When tests are made with the Ethyl Silicate, which is being sent to us by Gordon Vivian, we will compare them with those using the Silicone preparation now on hand and then plans for the most practical application will be made. With the present program of work I doubt if this job can be done by June 30.

July, 1954

State Construction: A new bridge across the Colorado River has been started. The old one-way bridge has begun to succumb to the wheels of the atomic age. An armed guard is posted to keep the drivers of the uranium Ore trucks from shifting gears on the bridge and enforce the 5 mph speed limit. The heavy truck traffic over the bridge has increased many times in the last few weeks with the stockpiling of ore at the new AEC sampling plant and we understand the highway engineers are alarmed over the accelerated deterioration of the old bridge.

Administration Cont.: Rumors are flying in Moab that Arches is to be opened up for Uranium mining. The personnel at this monument does not know a thing about it and in the past three weeks we have seen several faces fall and a few million dollars fade from the eyes of would-be minders who are sure they would be another Charley Steen if the monument were only opened up.

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September, 1954

Near Accident: One over-ambitious picture taking visitor, in an attempt to climb down on top of Landscape Arch, found himself in a spot where he could not climb up or down, and had to yell for help. A visitor reported his predicament to Ranger Fischer and he in turn reported to Headquarters. Ranger Morris and I left immediately with all the rope we could find, but by the time we had reached the Wayside Exhibit we learned that the man in trouble had cut foot holds with a hunting knife and come down safely. Another such photographer who tried this same trick in 1950 was picked up in a blanket.

June, 1955

Local Activities: Moab Canyon from the river bridge to its head is flowing with activity. The telephone line is being rebuilt, the new 138,000 volt power line construction is underway, the survey of the realignment of US 160 has been

completed, the natural gas line will be laid soon, the Uranium sampling plant is handling 1 ¼ million dollars worth of ore per month and to top it all off the construction of the new mill, started this week, which according to news reports will cost in the neighborhood of 12 ½ million dollars. It is all interesting but difficult for us to comprehend the vast sums of money being spent.

April, 1956

Personnel: Mr. Edward Abbey EOD as Seasonal Ranger on April 1. He also became a proud father of an eight pound boy on April 19.



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May, 1956

Protection: The increasing desire of fools to carve their names in public places has reached the highest level possible in Arches; Delicate Arch. A list of the new names found was made and an attempt to run a bluff by letter will be made with those whose address we have, but to get conclusive evidence we sill have to catch them in the act.

July, 1956

Proposed Park Area: A joint meeting of the Moab Chamber of Commerce and Lions Club was attended at which the possibility of including Dead Horse Point, Grand View Point, and Upheaval Dome in the National Park System was discussed. I advised them to write to the Regional Director for the current status of these three areas. I was also invited to attend a meeting of the Sons of the Utah Pioneers in Salt Lake City, but could not find the time to attend. Their desire is to make those areas, and others, into state parks.

Miscellaneous: On August 13 Dr. J.W. Williams, called The Father of the Arches died of a heart attack. He was 103 years of age. Dr. Williams was instrumental in starting the movement to create Arches National Monument and the proclamation was signed April 12, 1929 by President Hoover with his personal fountain pen.

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September, 1956

Personnel: Due to family complications it was necessary for Ranger Abbey to leave a week before his termination time was due. We were sorry to have him leave early and hope he will be back next summer.

Supervisory Ranger Lloyd M. Pierson arrived the evening of the 9th. I am afraid that this area will not provide a great deal of archeology for Lloyd and the quarters are definitely not like those at Chaco; however school for his children is only five miles away and apparently Lloyd has the ability to adapt himself to any area.

August, 1957

Grand County Sheriff's Office: Two days were spent by Superintendent Wilson and one day each by Rangers Pierson, John Abbey and Ed Abbey in searching for a missing man, 70 year old Clinton Kjar, in the Upheaval Dome area. The search party was led by Sheriff John Stocks. Ranger John Abbey found the body on the second day of the search; the man apparently died of a heart attack or heat exhaustion while taking pictures.

November, 1959

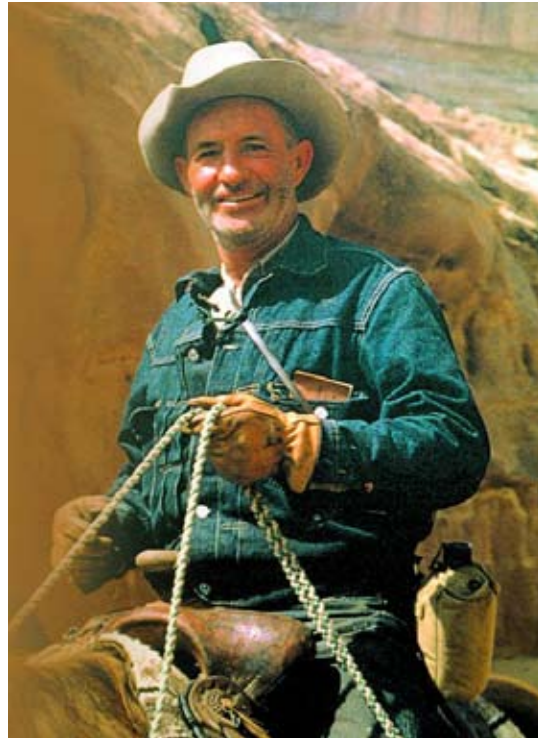
Protection: Due to the misuse of the area by local "Pipe-Rattlers" and nocturnal "Beer-Can-Spreaders" it was necessary to close the area between the hours of 6:00 p.m. And 6:00 a.m. This thoughtless group is in the minority and local sentiment against their actions runs high. I doubt if it will be necessary to continue the closing of the area for very long.

January, 1960

Office Move: The big event of the New Year was our move to the new offices in the Visitor Center. This was accomplished on February 1, and our three desks and two file cabinets, which more than filled the 12' x 20' CCC Barracks Office, seem completely lost in the new space provided; however an order has been placed to complete our furniture needs for the entire building. At the moment the only available seating for the visitor is in the restrooms.

November, 1960

Protection & Ranger Services: All members of the staff, save the Superintendent, got their deer this year. "Ol Deadeye's" eyes were not dead eyeing. Add to this one case of acute Buck Fever and you don't bring home the bacon.



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POSTSCRIPT: In 1962, Bates turned the chore of writing monthly reports to his Chief Ranger, Slim Mabery. In October, 1964, Slim made this notation:

Special Activities: Canyonlands has been established as our 32nd National Park and Superintendent Wilson has been in the area with various planning groups throughout most of the month. Inspection teams and planning groups have included engineers, architects and park planners from the WASO, WODC, and Regional Staffs.

On the 15th Superintendent Wilson met Secretary Udall in Salt Lake City where his appointment to Superintendent of Canyonlands and promotion were announced to the public at a press conference held by the Secretary.

