

May 15, 2022

Grand Canyon History Tidbit

Winters on the North Rim

The **North Rim opened this weekend**, so a tidbit about winters on the North Rim. In a 1994 interview, **Warren Hamilton**, who was a **ranger at Grand Canyon, 1932-1940**, talked about wintering over on the North Rim in the early 1930's:

Hamilton: ...The new ranger coming into the park always got the assignment of staying on the North Rim in the winter. So, that winter of 1932, I stayed on the North Rim. The Utah Parks Company had two men there and we all had to shovel the snow off the roofs, you know, and check the wildlife and all that sort of thing. I was the Park Service caretaker.



#13548: MEN SHOVELING SNOW FROM THE ROOF OF BUILDING ON THE NORTH RIM, 1930's.



#15337: REX NAGLEY, CARETAKER FOR UNION PACIFIC, GRAND CANYON LODGE, CLEARING SNOW FROM ROOF, 1933. PHOTO BY WARREN HAMILTON.

Interviewer: Were you living in the lodge or in a cabin?

Hamilton: I lived in a ranger cabin there and spent the winter, which was very nice. The next winter, they didn't have any new rangers, so they were going to send one of the old timers, Bert Lauzon. He had kids in high school and didn't want to stay on the North Rim. So, I went to the Chief Ranger and said, "If you'll let Elaine [Hamilton's wife] stay with me, I'll take his tour on the North Rim." Now, they had never let a woman stay on the North Rim before.

Interviewer: So, she was the first ranger wife to stay?

Hamilton: Right. So, we stayed on the North Rim. We took a ton truck and went to Cedar City, Utah, to buy six month's groceries.

Interviewer: Because once you were there, that was it!

Hamilton: That was it. So, I used a list that they used for fire control, fighting fires, to furnish meals. I worked down the grocery list- they cost me one hundred and fifty dollars. For six months. I did buy a half a beef and hung that up out in the woodshed and it froze and so we would saw it off.

Interviewer: Saw what you needed? An automatic deep freeze. So, you would have had the meat and what, a lot of canned....

Hamilton: Canned goods. We had eggs now and then, what's called water glassed, to protect them from the air so they didn't spoil. We had butter down in brine... We had some grapes and things down in sawdust, and carrots. Under the bedroom, in the floor, there was a trap door and that's where you kept your vegetables, any of the tubers, and it was safe from any frost.

Interviewer: What did Elaine think of living there for six months.

Hamilton: Well, she seemed to enjoy it. We would get out playing in the snow. I had to teach her how to ski and we also used snowshoes in travelling around. We had a lot of books that we were going to read but we didn't have time to read all of them.

Interviewer: Did you have electricity, or did you have to use kerosene lamps? And woodstove or...

Hamilton: We did have electric power because the Union Pacific had a caretaker at their hydro plant down at Roaring Springs. He would operate it part of the day, mainly in the evening. Then at ten o'clock they'd go to bed, and we'd shut off the lights.

Had a little experience one night... we were sitting in the living room. Did you ever have occasion for your hair to kind of stand up on end? Well, it did that night. I couldn't figure out what was going on, so I went to the kitchen and locked the kitchen door, and I came back in the living room and was fiddling with the lock. Elaine said, "What are you doing?" "Oh, I thought I'd see if these would work." So, I locked the place up and we went to bed, and nothing happened. Got up the next morning and went out on the porch and within fifteen feet of the window where we had been sitting were these mountain lion tracks. It had come along and stopped and looked in at us, then went on down and climbed up in behind the snow at the cafeteria. The next morning the two caretakers from the lodge came up and they frightened this lion away from there. They came on up to our place and they said, "Guess what we saw!" I was one ahead of them! We never saw it again.

But the three of us [caretakers] would also go out to the checking station, which is twelve miles out. By skis. And shoveled off the buildings out there, shoveled the snow off the roof. One trip we went clear on over to VT Ranch, if you know that place on the North Rim, just outside the park about five miles.

Interviewer: Could you get out there in a day and get back or would you stay overnight?

Hamilton: We would stay overnight at the ranger station.



#13512: A MAN ON SKIS ON THE ROOF OF THE NORTH RIM ENTRANCE STATION, 1930S.

Interviewer: Did you ever have to get back across the canyon by hiking down and across?

Hamilton: Yes, in fact we ran low on either butter or milk, I can't remember just what it was, but talked to the South Rim and they sent whatever it was down to Phantom Ranch. So, I set off from the North Rim on snowshoes and went down the trail a couple three miles until I ran out of snow and then I walked on down to Roaring Spring and Phantom Ranch. This was in March and when I got there the peach and apricot trees were in bloom. Shows you the difference in the elevation as to how plant life is.

Interviewer: Now, after this winter did you just keep on staying year-round on the North Rim?

Hamilton: Yes, the second year I was put in charge of the North Rim, and I stayed on through that summer, and then we would move back to the South Rim in the winter and stay here through the winter. And then next spring we'd load up and go back to the North Rim. I did that several years. I think it was in 1937 though that they decided to keep me on the South Rim...



#15540: SPRING OPENING OF NORTH RIM ROAD. MARV ADAMS, NPS MAINTENANCE. CIRCA 1934. PHOTO BY WARREN HAMILTON.



#15541: SPRING OPENING OF NORTH RIM ROAD USING A STATE HIGHWAY PLOW, CIRCA 1934. PHOTO BY WARREN HAMILTON.



#15543: SNOW BLOWER DEVELOPED BY SOUTH RIM MAINTENANCE, BEING USED TO OPEN THE NORTH RIM ROAD, CIRCA 1937. PHOTO BY WARREN HAMILTON.