

# Introducing Zion & Bryce Canyon National Parks

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**T**here aren't many places in the world where the forces of nature have come together with such dramatic results as in Zion and Bryce Canyon national parks. From arid desert and desolate canyons to pine-covered peaks and awe-inspiring rock formations, these two parks—located about 85 miles apart in colorful southern Utah—offer some of the American West's most beautiful scenery, along with almost unlimited opportunities for hiking, camping, and other outdoor experiences.

Zion and Bryce Canyon sit on the vast, high Colorado Plateau. They share this plateau with Utah's three other national parks (Arches, Canyonlands, and Capitol Reef), as well as with Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona, Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado, Chaco Culture National Historical Park in New Mexico, a number of national monuments and state parks, the Hopi Indian Reservation, and the vast Navajo Nation.

The Colorado Plateau developed millions of years ago when forces deep within the earth forced the crust to rise, exposing many strata of rocks. Over several million more years, the power of erosion and weathering sculpted spectacular rock formations, colored with an iron-rich palette of reds, oranges, pinks, and browns.

Both Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks are known for their stunning rock formations—Zion for its massive sandstone monoliths, and Bryce for its more delicate limestone sculptures. But the wondrous natural architecture isn't the sole reason for visiting these parks. You will also find shimmering pools of deep green water, a sometimes-roaring river, forests of pine and fir, broad panoramic views, a vast array of plants and animals, and even a bit of human history, all of which are discussed in the following pages.

One thing that makes both parks so inviting is that they can be experienced in a variety of ways. Adventurers can savor challenging hiking trails and backcountry routes, while the curious can examine

millions of years of geologic history and have the chance to see rare plants and animals. Meanwhile, those with an artistic bent can simply lose themselves in the beauty of the parks.

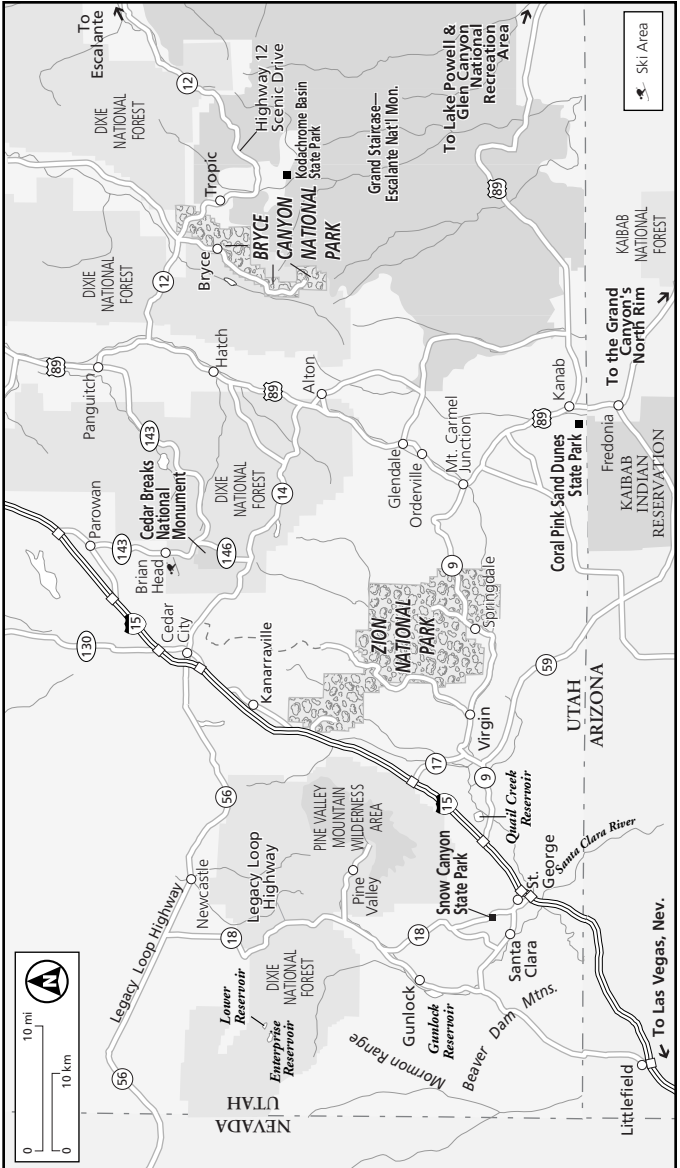
In searching for the essence of these natural worlds, you'll find well-developed and maintained trail systems, overlooks offering panoramic vistas, interpretative displays, museum programs, and knowledgeable park rangers ready to help you make the most of your visit. You can't possibly see everything there is to be seen here, and you shouldn't try. Zion and Bryce Canyon are not to be visited as if they were amusement parks, racing from ride to ride; these natural wonders are to be savored, embraced, and explored, and the best way to do that is to slow down. Take time to ponder the sunrise, sit quietly at the edge of a meadow and wait for a deer to emerge from the woods, and even, as the cliché goes, stop and smell the roses.

Bryce Amphitheater is enormous, filled with countless delightfully shaped and colored formations and groups of formations, with telling names such as Wall Street, Fairyland Canyon, and Queen's Garden. Meanwhile, the rugged stone monuments at Zion, such as the Watchman and the West Temple, are overpowering and tend to highlight the insignificance of mankind in the total scheme of things. Among America's western parks, these are two of the easiest to explore—to feel that you've gotten to know their very being. In large part, this is because their extensive trail and road systems enable visitors to explore these parks in fairly small, easily digestible bites; sampling one aspect, letting it settle, and then moving along for another taste.

We find Bryce Canyon National Park to be a bit more user-friendly than Zion, while Zion offers a greater variety of features to explore, from river canyons with colorful gardens to rocky windswept ridges. Bryce also has several fairly easy trails that lead right into the middle of some of its best scenery. This isn't to say that Zion is hard to get into, but because of the greater variety of terrain it takes a bit more time and effort to achieve that same feeling that you *know* the park.

One interesting difference between the parks is that at Zion you arrive at the bottom of the canyon, and in most cases look and hike up toward the rock formations. At Bryce Canyon you arrive at the top, along the rim, and look and then hike down into the amphitheaters. Foot-power is the best way to explore both parks, although those without the physical ability or desire to hike find that there is still quite a bit for them to see. Zion has the greater variety of hiking

# Southwestern Utah



### **Fun Fact Butch Cassidy Slept Here**

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Robert LeRoy Parker wasn't a bad kid. He was born into a hard-working Mormon family in the little southwestern Utah town of Beaver on April 13, 1866. The oldest of 13 children, Robert was said to be a great help to his mother, and worked on the small ranch his parents bought near Circleville, about 50 miles north of Bryce Canyon.

It was in Circleville where the problems began. Teenager Robert fell in with some rather unsavory characters, including one Mike Cassidy, the ne'er-do-well role model who reportedly gave the youth his first gun, and presumably from whom young Robert took the alias "Cassidy." The boy made his way to Telluride, Colorado, worked for one of the mines there for a while, and then wandered up to Wyoming. A little more wandering took him back to Telluride—and, strangely enough, the Telluride bank was robbed. Butch Cassidy had officially begun his life of crime.

In the following years, Butch—who gained the nickname after a short stint working in a butcher shop—became an expert at rustling cattle, robbing banks, and, his ultimate glory, robbing trains. Butch wanted to call his gang the Train Robbers Syndicate, but they raised such hell in celebration of their economic successes that saloonkeepers in Vernal and other Utah towns began calling them "that wild bunch," and the name stuck. The Wild Bunch would travel through Utah, hiding out in the desolate badlands that were to become Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef, and Canyonlands national parks. Capitol Reef's Cassidy Arch was named after

trails—more than double the number at Bryce—as well as more extreme variations in elevation and terrain. Because Zion is lower, you'll find more favorable hiking conditions in winter there, while summer hikers will appreciate the cooler temperatures in the higher elevations of Bryce Canyon.

## **1 The Best of Zion & Bryce Canyon National Parks**

Because planning a trip here can be bewildering, with so many options, we've assembled the very best that these parks and the surrounding areas have to offer.

Butch; this area was supposedly one of his favorite hiding places.

If you've seen the 1969 movie *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, with Paul Newman as Butch and Robert Redford as his partner-in-crime Sundance, you can't forget that spectacular scene in which Butch and his cohorts blow the door off a railroad car. Then they use way too much dynamite to open the safe, sending bills flying into the air. Apparently, the story is basically true, having taken place on June 2, 1899, near Wilcox, Wyoming. According to reports of the day, they got away with \$30,000.

The Union Pacific Railroad took exception to Butch's antics. When the posses started getting a bit too close, Butch, Sundance, and Sundance's lady friend, Etta Place (Katharine Ross in the film), took off for South America, where it's said they continued a life of crime for a half dozen or so years. There are also some stories—unconfirmed—that it was in South America that Butch first killed anyone, that up until that time he had avoided bloodshed whenever possible.

According to some historians (as well as the movie), Butch and Sundance were shot dead in a gun battle with army troops in Bolivia. But others say it's not so—that Butch returned to the United States, visited friends and family in Utah and Wyoming, and eventually settled in Spokane, Washington, where he lived a peaceful and respectable life under the name William T. Phillips, until he died of natural causes in 1937.

## THE BEST DAY HIKES

- **Emerald Pools Trail System** (Zion National Park): If green is your color, you'll love this trail—algae keep the three pools glowing a deep, rich, and yes, emerald green. The first part of the trail leads through a forest to the Lower Emerald Pool, with its lovely waterfall and hanging garden. See p. 60.
- **East Mesa Trail** (Zion National Park): Allow a full day for this 6-mile hike, which is an easier and shorter route to Observation Point than the Observation Point Trail. From the promontory, you'll get spectacular views down Zion Canyon, with the Great

White Throne in the foreground and Red Arch Mountain beyond. See p. 66.

- **Navajo/Queen's Garden Trails** (Bryce Canyon National Park): To truly experience magical Bryce Canyon, you should hike down into it, and this not-too-difficult combination of trails is the perfect way to go. Start at Sunset Point and get the steepest part out of the way first. You'll see Thor's Hammer, the towering skyscrapers of Wall Street, and some of the park's most fanciful formations, including majestic Queen Victoria. See p. 108.
- **Rim Trail** (Bryce Canyon National Park): This underrated trail is a delight, providing splendid views down into spectacularly scenic Bryce Amphitheater from a variety of vantage points over its 5.5-mile length. More walking than hiking, the Rim Trail includes a half-mile section between two overlooks—Sunrise and Sunset—that is suitable for wheelchairs. Views are especially fine early in the morning, when you can watch the changing light on the red rocks below. See p. 112.

## THE BEST BACKCOUNTRY HIKES

- **Hiking the Narrows** (Zion National Park): This is an experience unique to Zion National Park—a hike through a 1,000-foot-deep canyon, with water filling it from side to side in most places. Although much of Zion is dry rock, this is anything but, and it's an incredible experience for those in good shape and with strong nerves. It can be experienced in three ways—as a short day hike, a full-day hike, or an overnight hike—but all involve getting wet. **Warning:** Because the Narrows is prone to flash flooding, check weather forecasts and flash-flood potential carefully before setting out. See p. 71.
- **Riggs Spring Loop Trail** (Bryce Canyon National Park): Although this 9-mile loop can be hiked in 1 day, it's better as an overnight backpacking trip. This enables you to take your time to see wildlife (possibly even mountain lions), as you hike through forests of Douglas fir, ponderosa pines, piñons, and aspen, with views of the white and pink cliffs soaring above. See p. 113.

## THE BEST WILDLIFE VIEWING SPOTS

Check out chapter 10 for a complete guide to the flora and fauna of both parks.

- **Angels Landing Trail** (Zion National Park): The difficult hike on this trail provides opportunities to see mule deer, golden

eagles, peregrine falcons, and lizards; it also offers splendid views into Zion Canyon. **Warning:** The last half-mile of this trail is along a knife-edge ridge—*definitely* not for anyone with even a mild fear of heights. See p. 58.

- **Riverside Walk** (Zion National Park): Here, near the entrance to the Narrows, deep in a slot canyon carved by the Virgin River, you're apt to see the American dipper bird—also called the water ouzel—as it dives into the water in search of aquatic insects. This is also the only place in the world where you'll find the Zion snail, although it may be hard to recognize—it's only  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch across. **Warning:** Because the Narrows is prone to flash flooding, check weather forecasts carefully before setting out. See p. 62.
- **Weeping Rock Area** (Zion National Park): Easily accessible via a short but steep paved trail, Weeping Rock oozes water that nurtures lush hanging gardens and produces the perfect habitat for a variety of wildlife, especially birds. Watch for peregrine falcons, American dippers, canyon wrens, and white-throated swifts. See p. 63.
- **Riggs Spring Loop Trail** (Bryce Canyon National Park): This little-used backcountry trail through a woodland provides an opportunity to see a variety of wildlife, possibly even one of the park's elusive mountain lions. See p. 113.
- **Campgrounds** (both Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks): It couldn't be easier to see wildlife. Simply sit quietly at your campsite, preferably when few people are in the campground, and wait. You'll see Uinta chipmunks in both parks, white-tailed antelope squirrels at Zion, and golden-mantled ground squirrels at Bryce Canyon. There are almost always plenty of birds, and you're also apt to see mule deer, especially in Watchman Campground at Zion National Park. See chapters 5 and 8 for campground information.

## THE BEST SCENIC VIEWS

- **Zion Canyon Scenic Drive** (Zion National Park): The 12-mile round-trip drive through Zion Canyon is impressive no matter how you do it—in your own vehicle (in winter only) or on the shuttle from spring through fall. In every direction the views are awe-inspiring, as the massive stone formations reach for the heavens. The road also provides easy access to a number of wonderful viewpoints and trail heads just off the roadway. See p. 63.

- **Angels Landing** (Zion National Park): The strenuous Angels Landing Trail leads across a high narrow ridge to a spectacular and dizzying view of Zion Canyon. **Warning:** The last half-mile of this trail is along a knife-edge ridge—*definitely* not for anyone with a fear of heights. See p. 58.
- **The Narrows** (Zion National Park): The sheer 1,000-foot-high walls are awe-inspiring, almost frightening, as they enclose you in a narrow world of hanging gardens, waterfalls, and sculpted sandstone arches, with the Virgin River pouring over and around your feet and legs. The Narrows are too narrow to allow you to walk next to the river, so you have to wade right through it—but the views make it worth getting wet. **Warning:** Because the Narrows is prone to flash flooding, check weather forecasts carefully before setting out. See p. 62 and p. 71.
- **Inspiration Point** (Bryce Canyon National Park): An appropriately named stop, Inspiration Point provides a phenomenal view down into Bryce Amphitheater, the park's largest and most colorful natural amphitheater. From here you see the Silent City, packed with hoodoos (rock formations) that inspire the imagination. Some claim the view is even better just south of Inspiration Point along the Rim Trail, up a little rise, at what is usually called Upper Inspiration Point. See p. 98.
- **Queen's Garden Trail** (Bryce Canyon National Park): Presided over by majestic Queen Victoria, the thousands of colorful and intricately sculpted spires present a magnificent display when viewed from the rim. From this trail below, they're even better. See p. 98 and p. 108.
- **The Rim at Sunrise** (Bryce Canyon National Park): If you thought the hoodoos were magnificent in the full light of day, wait until you see them glowing with the deep colors of the morning sun as it rises slowly above the rim. The changing angle of light creates a constantly moving panorama of shadow and color. Walk along the Rim Trail or stop at the viewpoints along the northern half of the park's scenic drive. See p. 112 for the Rim Trail, and chapter 6 for information on the scenic drive.

## THE BEST NATURAL SPECTACLES

- **The Great White Throne** (Zion National Park): A huge white monolith, the Great White Throne demands attention as soon as you glimpse it. Considered the symbol of Zion National Park, this massive block of Navajo sandstone towers 2,000 feet



high, and can be seen from the scenic drive as well as from several hiking trails, including Observation Point Trail, Deertrap Mountain Trail, Angels Landing Trail, and Emerald Pools Trail. See chapters 3 and 4 for descriptions of the Great White Throne and the trails that give you the best vantage points.

- **The Narrows** (Zion National Park): It's difficult to comprehend that this beautiful canyon, 1,000 feet deep and less than 30 feet wide in places, was carved from solid stone, beginning millions of years ago, by the often gently flowing Virgin River at your feet. But to see the flip side of the river, just wait for a rainstorm; it becomes an angry, destructive force that you can well imagine would slice through anything that got in its way. **Warning:** Because the Narrows is prone to flash flooding, check weather forecasts carefully before setting out. See p. 62 and p. 71.
- **Queen Victoria** (Bryce Canyon National Park): Among the most impressive hoodoos in the park, from the right angle this honestly looks just like the photos of England's Queen Victoria that you see in books and magazines. It even has the same air of superiority. See p. 108.
- **Bryce Amphitheater Capped with Snow** (Bryce Canyon National Park): The hoodoos become transformed into intricately carved creatures topped with white icing, a fairyland in orange and white. You'll get great views either from stops along the scenic drive or by walking the Rim Trail. See p. 112 for the Rim Trail, and chapter 6 for information on the scenic drive.

## THE BEST WINTER SPORTS LOCATION

- **Fairyland Loop Trail** (Bryce Canyon National Park): There aren't many cross-country ski trails that can match Bryce Canyon's Fairyland Loop for scenic beauty. The trail leads 1 mile through a pine and juniper forest to the Fairyland Point Overlook, with spectacular views into Bryce Amphitheater, where a blanket of snow adorns the multicolored hoodoos with a sparkling white mantle. See p. 109

## THE BEST CHILDREN'S & FAMILY EXPERIENCES

- **Junior Rangers/Explorers Program** (Zion National Park): Although Junior Rangers programs are available at most national parks, the one offered at Zion each summer is quite extensive, with both morning and afternoon activities that teach kids what makes this natural wonder so special. See p. 56.

- **Weeping Rock Trail** (Zion National Park): This short hike on a paved trail has interpretive signs explaining the natural history of the area. But the best part is at the end, when the trail arrives at a rock alcove with lush hanging gardens of ferns and wildflowers, where you can lift your face to receive a cooling spray of mist from above. See p. 63.
- **Queen's Garden Trail** (Bryce Canyon National Park): Not only is this trail fairly easy, but it drops down into one of the most scenic parts of the park, meandering among unique and oddly carved hoodoos. It's fun to let your imagination run wild, both for youngsters and the kid in all of us. See p. 108.

## THE BEST DRIVE-IN CAMPING

- **Watchman Campground** (Zion National Park): Located just inside the park's south entrance, Watchman Campground has well-spaced sites and lots of trees. In addition, this campground is near the park shuttle terminal, providing easy access to the popular upper Zion Canyon section of the park. And it even has electric hookups for RVs, a rarity in national parks. See p. 86.
- **North Campground** (Bryce Canyon National Park): While both of Bryce Canyon National Park's campgrounds offer plenty of trees, providing that genuine "forest camping" experience, North Campground is closer to the Rim Trail than the park's other campground, making it easier to rush over to catch those amazing sunrise colors. See p. 124.
- **Ruby's Inn RV Park & Campground** (near Bryce Canyon National Park): For those who want full RV hookups, a woodsy camping experience, lots of amenities, and easy access to the national park, this is the place to be. Part of a giant complex containing a motel, shops, swimming pools, and all sorts of other attractions and activities, this campground has trees and open space as well. See p. 124.

## THE BEST BACKCOUNTRY CAMPING

- **La Verkin Creek/Kolob Arch Trails** (Zion National Park): You'll have to sign up in advance for one of the isolated campsites along this spectacularly scenic trail in the Kolob Canyons. The trail takes you through forests of conifers, cottonwoods, and box elders, past hanging gardens and a series of waterfalls. There is also a side trip to a view of Kolob Arch—at over 300 feet wide, one of the largest natural arches in the world. See p. 71.

## THE BEST LODGING

- **Zion Lodge** (Zion National Park; ☎ 435/772-7700): The handsome Zion Lodge was built by the Union Pacific Railroad. Tragedy struck in 1966 when it was destroyed by fire. However, it was rebuilt the following year in its original style, and continues to offer the best lodging and location in Zion. Situated in a forest with spectacular views of the park's rock cliffs, it offers both cabins and motel rooms. Each of the charming cabins has a private porch, stone (gas-burning) fireplace, two double beds, and log beams. See p. 78.
- **Flanigan's Inn** (near Zion National Park; ☎ 800/765-7787 or 435/772-3244): Made of natural wood and rock, and set among trees, lawns, and flowers just outside the entrance to Zion National Park, this attractive complex has a mountain-lodge atmosphere. It's a place where you might actually want to spend some time—unlike some other area options, which are just good places to crash at the end of a busy day. See p. 82.
- **Bryce Canyon Lodge** (Bryce Canyon National Park; ☎ 435/834-5361): This handsome sandstone and ponderosa pine lodge is the perfect place to stay while visiting the park. Opened in 1924, it has all the atmosphere of the 1920s, but it also has most of the modern conveniences people expect today. Especially recommended are its delightful cabins, which have been authentically restored and contain gas-burning stone fireplaces. Those wanting a bit more elegance will enjoy one of the lodge's suites, which are decorated with white wicker furnishings and have ceiling fans and separate sitting areas. See p. 119.
- **Best Western Ruby's Inn** (near Bryce Canyon National Park; ☎ 866/866-6616 or 435/834-5341): The motel rooms here are fine—clean and well maintained, with color TVs, telephones, and air-conditioning—but the real reason to stay here is the location, just outside the park entrance. Numerous amenities are offered, from swimming pools and restaurants to shuttle service. This place has an incredible tour desk to book activities. See p. 119.
- **Stone Canyon Inn** (near Bryce Canyon National Park; ☎ 866/489-4680): Quiet seclusion, loads of charm, and absolutely splendid views are only three of the reasons we highly recommend this inn—it is also very upscale and *the* place to come to be pampered. Each of the six guest rooms is unique, with queen- or king-size beds, handsome wood furnishings, and a

classic Western look. The luxurious cottages each have two bedrooms and two bathrooms, a gas fireplace, full kitchen, and a private deck with a hot tub. See p. 123.

## THE BEST RESTAURANTS

- **Zion Lodge** (Zion National Park; ☎ 435/772-3213): You can't beat the view here—large picture windows face the park's magnificent rock formations—and the food is pretty special, too. Try the Santa Fe flat iron steak or the very popular Ruby Mountain trout amandine. See p. 88.
- **Bit & Spur Restaurant & Saloon** (near Zion National Park; ☎ 435/772-3498): Although this looks like a rough-and-tumble Old West saloon at first glance, it's really a very good restaurant, similar to one of the better restaurants in Santa Fe. The menu includes Mexican standards such as burritos, flautas, and traditional chile stew, but you'll also find more exotic creations. Portions are generous. See p. 89.
- **Bryce Canyon Lodge** (Bryce Canyon National Park; ☎ 435/834-8760): A delightful mountain-lodge atmosphere and excellent food make the Bryce Canyon Lodge Dining Room a winner. Decorated with American Indian weavings and baskets, the restaurant has two large stone fireplaces and picture windows looking out at the park. The menu here is similar to that at the Zion Lodge, with house specialties such as fresh Utah trout, plus chicken dishes and vegetarian items. Then there are the lodge's specialty ice creams and desserts, such as the exotic and very tasty wild "Bryceberry" bread pudding (you won't get that at Zion!). See p. 127.

## THE BEST SIDE TRIPS

- **Cedar Breaks National Monument** (near Cedar City, a side trip from Zion National Park): A delightful little park, Cedar Breaks National Monument is a junior Bryce Canyon, with a spectacular natural amphitheater filled with stone spires, arches, and columns, and painted in reds, purples, oranges, and ochers. You can camp among the spruce, firs, and wildflowers that blanket the 10,000-foot plateau each summer. See p. 135.
- **Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument** (near Bryce Canyon National Park): This vast wilderness, covering some 1.7 million acres, is known for its stark, rugged beauty, including striking red-orange canyons and deep river valleys. Unlike

most other national monuments, almost all of this sweeping area is undeveloped—there are few all-weather roads, only one maintained hiking trail, and two small developed campgrounds. But for the adventurous, there are miles upon miles of dirt roads and practically unlimited opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, camping, and exploring. See p. 138.

## 2 A Look at Zion

While it may be easy to conjure up a single defining image of the enormous Grand Canyon or the delicately sculpted rock hoodoos of Bryce, Zion is more difficult to pin down. Here you'll find a collage of images and secrets, an entire smorgasbord of experiences, sights, and even smells, from massive stone sculptures and monuments to lush forests and roaring rivers. Zion is a park to explore, not merely to see; take time to walk its trails, visit viewpoints at different times of the day to see the changing light, and let the park work its magic on you.

First established as Mukuntuweap National Monument in 1909—*mukuntuweap* is a Paiute Indian word meaning “straight arrow”—its name was changed to Zion National Monument in 1918, and the area gained national park status the following year. Comprising more than 147,000 acres, the park covers a wide range of elevations—from 3,700 to 8,726 feet above sea level—and terrain that runs the gamut from desert to forest, with a dramatic river canyon known as the Narrows thrown in for good measure.

These extremes of elevation have resulted in extremes of climate as well—temperatures in the desert areas soar to well over 100°F (38°C) in the summer, while higher elevations are sometimes covered with snow and ice in the winter. Due to this variety of conditions, Zion harbors a vast array of plant life, ranging from cactus and yucca to ponderosa pines and cottonwoods. In fact, with almost 800 native species, Zion National Park is said to have the richest diversity of plants in Utah. Be sure to watch for hanging gardens, kept alive with water from porous rocks, which you'll see clinging to the sides of cliffs.

Zion is also home to a great variety of animals, drawn here in large part by the year-round water source. Indigenous mammals range from pocket gophers to mountain lions; you'll also spy hundreds of birds, lizards of all shapes and sizes, and a dozen species of snakes. (Only the Great Basin rattlesnake is poisonous, and it usually slithers

## **Impressions**

*Nothing can exceed the wondrous beauty of Zion . . . in the nobility and beauty of the sculptures there is no comparison.*

—Geologist Clarence Dutton (1880)

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away from you faster than you can run from it.) Mule deer are commonly observed grazing along the forest edges, and practically every park visitor comes across squirrels and chipmunks. A few elk and bighorn sheep may surface, although they're seldom seen. Among the creatures unique to the park is the tiny Zion snail. See chapter 10 for more details on the flora and fauna of the parks.

Of course, it's not only plants and animals that need water. For some 1,500 years, humans have come here seeking not only water but also the plants and animals that the water nurtures. There is evidence that a group of people known as the Basket Makers lived here as early as A.D. 500, hunting the area's wildlife, gathering berries and seeds, and growing corn, squash, and other crops. They apparently abandoned the area about A.D. 1200, perhaps because of climate changes. Members of the American Indian tribe called the Paiutes—whose descendants still live in southern Utah—are believed to have spent time in what is now the national park, but built no permanent homes. Spanish explorers were in the area in the late 18th century, and American fur traders came in the early 19th century, but there is no evidence that either actually entered what is now Zion Canyon National Park proper.

Historians believe that it was not until the 1850s that European-Americans finally ventured into Zion Canyon. Probably the first was pioneer Nephi Johnson, who was shown Zion Canyon by Paiutes in November 1858, and for whom Johnson Mountain is named. He was among a group of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (known as Mormons) that was sent from Salt Lake City by church leader Brigham Young in search of arable land. By the early 1860s, the Mormons had begun to establish farms and ranches in the area, near where Zion Lodge is located today and at other locations in what is now the national park. It was early Mormon settler Isaac Behunin who is credited with naming his homestead “Little Zion,” because it seemed to him to be a bit of heaven on earth.

In the 1870s, Major John Wesley Powell explored the area, describing Angels Landing, Court of the Patriarchs, and some of the park's other now-famous landmarks in his journals. At about the same time, surveyor G. K. Gilbert was mapping southern Utah. He named the Narrows and described it as "the most wonderful defile it has been my fortune to behold."

Today, Zion National Park casts a spell over you as you gaze upon its sheer multicolored walls of sandstone, explore its narrow canyons, search for hanging gardens of ferns and wildflowers, and listen to the roar of the churning, tumbling Virgin River.

### 3 A Look at Bryce Canyon

One of America's most scenic destinations, Bryce Canyon National Park is a magical land, a place of inspiration and spectacular beauty where thousands of intricately shaped rock formations stir the imagination as they stand silent watch in their colorful cathedrals. Bryce Canyon is also one of the West's most accessible national parks. Several trails lead down into the canyon—technically what geologists call an amphitheater—making it relatively easy to get to know this beautiful jewel up close. In addition, there's an easy Rim Trail, part of which is wheelchair accessible, which makes many of the park's best views available to virtually everyone.

The canyon ranges in elevation from 6,620 to 9,115 feet, with desert terrain of piñon, juniper, sagebrush, and cactus at the lower levels, and a cool high country consisting of a dense forest of fir, spruce, and even ancient bristlecone pines. In between, where the campgrounds and visitor center are located, is a ponderosa pine forest.

Bryce Canyon is best known for its hoodoos, which geologists tell us are simply pinnacles of rock, often oddly shaped, left standing after millions of years of water and wind erosion. But perhaps a more interesting explanation lies in a Paiute legend. These American Indians, who lived in the area for several hundred years before being forced out by Anglo pioneers, told of a "Legend People" who lived here in the old days. The powerful Coyote turned them to stone for their evil ways, and today they remain frozen in time.

Whatever the cause, Bryce Canyon is delightfully unique. Its intricate and often whimsical formations are smaller and on a more human scale than the impressive rocks seen at nearby Zion. And,

## **Impressions**

*Such glorious tints, such keen contrasts of light and shade . . . can never be forgotten. . . . This is one of the grand panoramas of the plateau country.*

—Geologist Clarence Dutton (1880)

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Bryce Canyon is far easier to explore than the sometimes intimidating vastness of Grand Canyon National Park. Bryce is comfortable and inviting in its beauty; we feel we know it simply by gazing over the rim, and we're on intimate terms after just one morning on the trail.

Although the colorful hoodoos are the first things that grab your attention, it isn't long before you notice the deep amphitheaters that envelope them, with their cliffs, windows, and arches all colored in shades of red, brown, orange, yellow, and white that change and glow with the rising and setting sun. Beyond the rocks and light are the other faces of the park: three separate life zones, each with its own unique vegetation, changing with elevation; and a kingdom of animals, from the busy chipmunks and ground squirrels to stately mule deer and their archenemy, the mountain lion. Also sometimes present in the more remote areas of the park are elk and pronghorn.

It's not known if prehistoric peoples actually saw the wonderful hoodoos at Bryce Canyon, although archaeologists do know that Paleo-Indians hunted in the area some 15,000 years ago. By about A.D. 700, the Basket Makers had established small villages in Paria Valley, east of Bryce Canyon in what is now Grand Staircase–Escalante National Monument, also discussed in this book (see chapter 9). By about A.D. 1100, Ancestral Puebloan peoples (also called the Anasazi) were living east of Bryce Canyon, and are believed to have visited what is now the park in search of game and timber.

However, serious exploration of the Bryce area likely began later, with the Paiutes; and it's possible that trappers, prospectors, and early Mormon scouts may have visited here in the early to mid-1800s, before Major John Wesley Powell conducted the first thorough survey of the region in the early 1870s. Shortly after Powell's exploration of the park area—in 1875—Mormon pioneer Ebenezer Bryce, a Scottish carpenter, and his wife, Mary, moved here and tried raising cattle. Their home became known as “Bryce's Canyon.”



Although they stayed only 5 years before moving to Arizona, Bryce's legacy is his name and his oft-quoted description of the canyon as "a helluva place to lose a cow."

The smallest of Utah's five national parks, with an area of just under 36,000 acres, Bryce Canyon was declared a national monument by President Warren Harding in 1923. The following year, Congress passed provisional legislation to make this area into "Utah National Park." In 1928, the change in status was finalized and the park was renamed Bryce Canyon National Park, in honor of one of its early residents.