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Colorado National Monument

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Memorandum for the Superintendent of Mesa Verde National Park

B. R. Finch

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UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
COLORADO NATIONAL MONUMENT
GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO

July 1, 1946.



Memorandum for the Coordinating Superintendent,
Mesa Verde National Park.

There follows a brief report of activities at the Colorado National Monument for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1946:

Personnel

Custodian George Hepper was transferred from the monument on November 3, 1945 to the Shasta Lake Recreation Area near Redding, California. B.R. Finch, Acting Chief Ranger at Glacier National Park was returned to the monument as Custodian on December 10, 1945. During the interim, Park Ranger Raymond Dobbins acted as Custodian.

Ranger Dobbins, General Foreman Atchison and the Custodian composed the entire Monument personnel until April 1, 1946 when Park Ranger Charles Smith returned from military furlough.

During the spring, a Handyman Mechanic, Truck Driver, and two Laborers were employed to help get the Monument and equipment in shape for the travel season which was expected to be heavy.

Travel

During the fiscal year, 7310 cars with 20950 people visited the Monument. 303 of these were members of the armed forces. The checking station was not in operation during 1945. On June 1, 1946 it was reopened and during the month 4765 people were registered. This is an increase of 260% over June of 1945. Of course during 1945 all travel was estimated but it is felt that a fairly accurate count was made.

Weather

The winter and spring have been exceptionally dry. Only .19 inches of precipitation was recorded during June. Last year the precipitation in June was 1.50 inches, in 1944 it was 1.14 inches and in 1943 it was 1.32 inches. This lack of moisture has made everything very dry and sources of water are beginning to dry up. Many stockmen are hauling water to their stock. If the drought is not broken soon, the water supply for the bison may be imperiled. A close watch is being maintained.

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Accidents

Miss Roxie Selvey, an inmate of the Colorado State Home and Training school for mental defectives, fell from a cliff in Ho Thoroughfare Canyon on September 19. The fall occurred just outside the Monument boundary. Monument personnel assisted in the recovery of the body.

Protection

Two arrests for deer poaching in the Monument were made during the year.

New Construction

The Mountain States Telephone Company completed the building of a new line across the Monument near Cold Shivers Point. The new line is fairly well hidden and certainly is much better than the old line to Glade Park which was an "eye sore" of the worst sort.

Abandoned CCC Camps.

CCC Camps NP-8-C and NP-9-C were transferred from the Farm Security Administration to the Grand Junction Goodwill Industries. The buildings were then sold to the highest bidders. All buildings in Camp NP-9-C except two which were given to the Park Service have been razed and the sites cleaned up and restored. In NP-8-C two buildings which were given to the Boy Scouts are still there awaiting an opportunity to move them in sections farther back on Pinon Mesa. All the other buildings are removed but cleanup operations are still in progress.

Water Systems

The Fruita Water line which crosses the Monument was damaged by a small avalanche on April 2. Temporary repairs were made so that Fruita was not without water. Due to the condition of the appropriations, it was requested that we delay permanent repairs until after the new fiscal year. As soon as materials can be purchased, this line will be rebuilt for a short way and located in a safer place.

Maintenance

All buildings, roofs, camp tables and garbage can containers were painted.

General Foreman Atchison spent three months hauling and spreading dirt on the Serpent's Trail.

A rock slide of several hundred tons blocked the road in Fruita Canyon for a short time. It was quickly removed.

The old officer's quarters in Camp NF-9-C was remodeled into a four room cottage by Monument personnel. It is being occupied now by Ranger Smith.

In spite of lack of personnel the maintenance of buildings, camp grounds, and the Rim Rock Drive has not suffered. We feel that every thing is in better condition than it was before the war. Much credit is due General Foreman Atchison for his "one man crew" campaign of maintaining the road and equipment.

Wildlife

"Johannes", patriarch bull of the bison herd was found dead on August 14. By conservative estimates, he must have been close to 30 years old.

A rattlesnake was seen in the Utility area at Monument Headquarters. This is unusual since rattlesnakes are rare on the Monument.

The elk herd has increased to 23 known animals. It spends its time between Ute Canyon and the Pison Mesa. Some signs that it has wandered into Monument Canyon has been seen. This herd comes and goes from the Monument at will. A well worn trail leads from Ute Canyon to the Mesa top. It spent most of the winter outside the Monument.

Porcupines do not seem to be increasing. The orchardists in the Redlands area registered a protest against the fact that Monument porcupines were damaging fruit trees. The many patrols which have been made along the boundary fence and the several night hunts along the granite benches have failed to discover more than one female porcupine which was shot. However, the fact that an effort is being made to assist them, has produced a better feeling among the orchardists toward the Monument. At the present time no damage is being reported.

On January 23 the bison herd was reduced by 10 animals. The meat was given to the Ute Indians. At the present time, to the best of our knowledge, the herd consists of 20 adults and three calves.

Forest Fire Protection

Only two small fires occurred, one on July 12, 1945 and one on June 16, 1946. Both were caused by lightning and were confined to one tree. There were no man caused fires.

Conservation

The limiting of the bison herd at the Colorado National Monument will be a great help in bringing the range back to somewhere near its original state. Overgrazing combined with natural erosion in the canyon bottoms was rapidly depleting the range of what little grass was there. A remarkable difference is seen already. Even with an exceptionally dry year, there is plenty of forage for the 20 animals now in the herd as well as 23 elk and several mule deer.

Since construction along the highway has stopped and special care has been exercised in keeping cars from parking or driving off the roads, the natural bushes and grasses are making a remarkable growth. Exotic weeds including thistles, tumble weed, and sweet clover that once lined the Rim Rock Drive have been kept cleaned off until now the native grasses and sage brush have grown to the point where the exotics are crowded out and are disappearing.


B.R. Finch
Custodian

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Robert A. Rose
Coordinating Superintendent