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Preserving a Habitat for Wonder

CAROL HARALSON

“On August 25, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed the act creating the National Park Service, a new federal bureau in the Department of the Interior responsible for protecting the 40 [now nearly 400] national parks and monuments then in existence and those yet to be established.” The NPS was charged with conserving “the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein . . . by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

— National Park Service

“If I had influence with the good fairy, who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from sources of our strength.” — Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder*

“Writing several years after Rachel Carson’s SILENT SPRING, at a time when the budding environmental movement was focused on the practical work of curbing DDT and other chemical pollutants, [Gregory] Bateson argued that . . . Humankind . . . believed, wrongly, that mind and nature operated independently of each other. In fact, nature was a recursive, mindlike system; its unit of exchange wasn’t energy, as most ecologists argued, but information. The way we thought about the world could change that world, and the world could in turn change us.” — Daniel B. Smith



sensation close to that of virtual reality.

The movie’s story line revolved around the fight to preserve a rare ecosystem and aboriginal culture. In some future time, military forces join with corporate developers from a planet Earth where “not a green thing still exists” to invade Pandora, an imaginary moon they hope to exploit for its resources. To do that, however, they must displace or plough their way through a tribe of nine-foot-tall blue-skinned creatures whose tree-like

Around New Year’s Day 2010, director James Cameron debuted the futuristic fantasy *Avatar*. It played in theaters in both traditional format (suddenly the two-dimensional movie had become “traditional”) and an evolved form of 3-D animation that, viewed through a pair of special glasses, produced a

communal home sits squarely over the mineral the humans wish to extract. In order to infiltrate the creatures and persuade them to move, scientists create avatars, beings that look like the Na’vi, the blue people of Pandora, but are animated by the consciousness of human operators. One of these operators switches allegiance and helps defeat the human invaders. Ultimately he leaves behind his broken human body and permanently adopts the form of his Na’vi avatar.

By mid-February 2010, *Avatar* was nominated for nine Oscars (it would go on to win for cinematography, art direction, and visual effects) and had been seen by so many moviegoers that its box office receipts topped a record \$2 billion. The film offered technical novelty, beauty, and the archetypal drama of good versus evil. But *Avatar* also gave audiences something else they hungered for: reconnection with wonder, a refreshment of the capacity to marvel. It offered a pair of magic glasses to breach the distance between us and a fantastically graceful, complex, and exotic world, one eminently worth preserving.

The great thing is that such a world surrounds us at every moment.

Here in the Southwest, amid the nation’s richest concentration of public lands, we are particularly aware of this. Like the fictional Pandora, the protected wildlands of the West are uniquely hospitable to inner transformation and suddenly altered perspectives. They are places where we can collapse the distance between vicarious and direct experience, places where we can become our own avatars.

Among other things, the plotline of *Avatar* holds a clue to accessing wonder: through direct encounter. To the humans locked away in their hermetic encampment, the homeland of the Na’vi was deadly. For the avatar with his feet literally on the ground, it became a place of magic. Intimacy with the environment might mean anything from closely studying a mesquite pod to trekking to the bottom of Grand Canyon, so long as it engages the ability to be fully present. “Come to your senses,” says a sculptor friend. “Stop and look at just one thing, a leaf or a stone or a beam of light.” Look long enough, closely enough, and the world vanishes around that one marvel that is a doorway to all marvels.

The writings of John Muir reflect his gift for this kind of focus. Muir, first president of the Sierra Club, was influential in convincing President Theodore Roosevelt of the need for a national conservation program and is credited with helping to save the Grand Canyon and Petrified Forest. Throughout his life he regularly disappeared into the American wilderness, exploring great swaths of forest alone, on foot, carrying only bread and tea. In his 1911 journal, he wrote:

June 19.— Pure sunshine all day. How beautiful a rock is made by leaf shadows! Those of the Live-oak are particularly clear and distinct, and beyond all art in grace and delicacy, now still as if painted on stone, now gliding softly as if afraid of noise, now dancing, waltzing in swift, merry swirls, or jumping on and off sunny rocks in quick dashes like wave embroidery on seashore cliffs. How true and substantial is this shadow beauty, and with what sublime extravagance is beauty thus multiplied!

Wonder, though sufficiently universal to have a shared definition, differs from person to person in trigger and duration and within each person across a lifetime. For some the wonder of a firefly is the chemistry that switches on its tiny lamp. For others it is the dark meadow embroidered with twinkling light. Still others are moved by connections between the incandescent insect and human experience: a scene from Shakespeare, a poem, a remembered kiss. At times delight arrives through the

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resetting of mystery into the terms of the knowable. At other times we are most open to life’s kaleidoscopic dazzle in the absence of names or explanations.

The preserved spaces of parks, monuments, and other public lands invite all manner and styles of experience: physical adventure, scientific inquiry, writing, art. Art in particular has recently been acknowledged in park exhibitions and programs for its power to express images of individual wonder inspired by the West. But you need not be a professional writer or artist to connect through words and images to the land. Simply look. “Seeing is the most delicate form of touch.” Or, spend an hour trailing your fingertip along the jawline of the world by tracing the contour of a leaf or stone with pencil on paper. I recall once trying to draw a distant rock formation in the New Mexican

landscape. I couldn’t seem to take in all its folds and peaks, so I started again and tried to draw a tangle of nearby boulders. Finally I found myself drawing one baked-potato-sized rock in the dust beside my feet. I drew it again and again. Hours later, dizzy with knowledge of one rock, I was somehow connected as never before to the entirety of the mineral world around me. Close looking, drawing, writing, gliding downriver, waking under stars—all clear a space for wonder by cutting experience out of time, so that the land, the visitor, and the moment inhabit a single suspended present.

The film *Avatar* allowed audiences to leap vicariously across alpine chasms and ascend into wooded mountains hanging upside down in the sky, as if they too, like the movie’s human hero, were embodied in a powerful blue Na’vi avatar. Outside the theater, because of the vision of those who set aside our public lands, we can visit real worlds that are even more astonishing.

Strewn like jewels through the arid western lands are rare protected places, Pandoras, whose very creation demonstrates the best that is in us. We need these pristine places not just because they are pretty, or because they harbor valuable plants and animals, or because they lay astride mineral resources, but because they offer a vital set of possibilities for restoration and authenticity, because they remind us of our true origins and interconnectedness, because they are natural habitats for wonder.



Photo by Elena Miras - Natural Light Photography.

“We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in. For it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope.”

— WALLACE STEGNER, 1960

Wallace Stegner’s eloquent statement was an appeal for protection of the wildlands of the Colorado Plateau, for they hold a unique place in the human experience, and should be preserved simply because they exist. His now-famous phrase “geography of hope” has become synonymous with a healthy and vibrant land. In the half-century since Stegner’s entreaty, people have done far more than just drive to the edge of this land and

look in. The post-World War II years saw the beginning of what author and lawyer Charles Wilkinson calls the Big Buildup, in which the major urban-industrial centers surrounding the plateau grew quickly and began to eye the impressive wilderness at their back door as a source of resources, energy, and open space for recreation and development.

The plateau’s population has more than doubled since the mid-1960s. During much of this time the region experienced greater growth than that of the western United States as a whole, as people fled the hyper-urbanized coast. And if people were not moving to the plateau to live, they came as tourists. Visitation to many National Park Service units on the Colorado Plateau increased by 400 to 500 percent in fifty years (visitation at Arches National Park increased by a whopping 1,300 percent). The popularity of four-wheel-drive vehicles and mountain bikes opened large tracts of previously inaccessible public land, and the number of backcountry visitors likewise soared. Towns sprouted near parks to serve guests and support the workforce. Changes due to mining, grazing, power generation, forest management practices, recreation, and construction may be unprecedented in their impact on biotic communities. Add to this the confounding effects of regional and global climate change, and the rapid deterioration of fragile landscapes throughout the Southwest is what some researchers are calling an ecological crisis.

Fortunately, a passionate and dedicated generation of scientists, land managers, and conservationists has taken up the standard to protect and preserve Stegner’s Geography of Hope. This article examines a few of these challenges, as well as the work being done to mitigate damage.

LIQUID GOLD

ENTREPRENEURS AND DEVELOPERS eyeing the Colorado Plateau in the early twentieth century dreamed of capturing and redirecting the Colorado River to supply ranches, farms, and cities throughout the seven states of the river’s drainage basin. A century later, hundreds of miles of the Colorado and Green rivers and their tributaries languish behind dams, and this dream has largely been realized. Glen Canyon may have been the last major dam built in the United States, but formidable water projects in the region proceed despite the fact that the estimated average flows of these rivers are substantially over-committed, both on paper and in reality.



Facing: A young *Draba* plant, from the mustard family, grows in parched soil at Arches National Park. Photo by Frank Zullo. Above: A small waterfall with water-carved channels, Coyote Gulch, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Utah. Photo by Laurence Parent.



House AS HISTORY

ELIZABETH A. GREEN

Hunting for a house in northwest Colorado many years ago taught me something about culture and home design. The more places we saw, the more clearly a pattern emerged. Aside from the typical split levels and ranches, some houses had second kitchens downstairs. Others had large living spaces, spacious pantries, and tiny bedrooms. The former were built by Greek families accustomed to using separate summer and winter kitchens, I was told. The latter? Mormon homes, built to store a year's worth of staples and encourage family interaction.

Culture, lifestyle, values, environment—all play a part in what we build and how we use those spaces. They also influence how we interpret what others have built. Insights into the human experience are preserved in the structures that surround us.

Facing: Ancient architecture. Photo by George Huey.
Right: Ghost town of Verdure, founded in 1877, is the oldest Mormon settlement in the Blue Mountains, San Juan County, Utah. Photo by Fred Hirschmann.



Family Jewel

An Interview with Wink Crigler of the X Diamond Ranch

PETER FRIEDERICI

The basalt rimrock rises high where the headwaters of the Little Colorado River leave the highlands of the White Mountains and enter the wide grasslands around the twin towns of Springerville and Eager. Tucked into the valley is Wink Crigler's X Diamond ranch, one of only a handful of traditional family ranches to survive into the modern era here.

A gracious woman with deeply held opinions, Crigler wears a lot of hats and has demonstrated the considerable resilience needed to remain a working rancher. She raises cattle and runs popular guest cabins. In recent years she restored significant stretches of riparian habitat to health and defeated an effort to subdivide her ranch for houses. She's also an avid amateur historian. When she explores the White Mountains' past, her research inevitably circles back around to her own family, for her grandparents may be said to have begun the guest-ranch tradition here.

That's a proud history, but one juxtaposed with an uncertain future. Recreation and land values in the region have both exploded, making it difficult to continue ranching cattle on public or private lands. Crigler has been a leading force behind a new Ranching Heritage Alliance whose goal is to ensure that

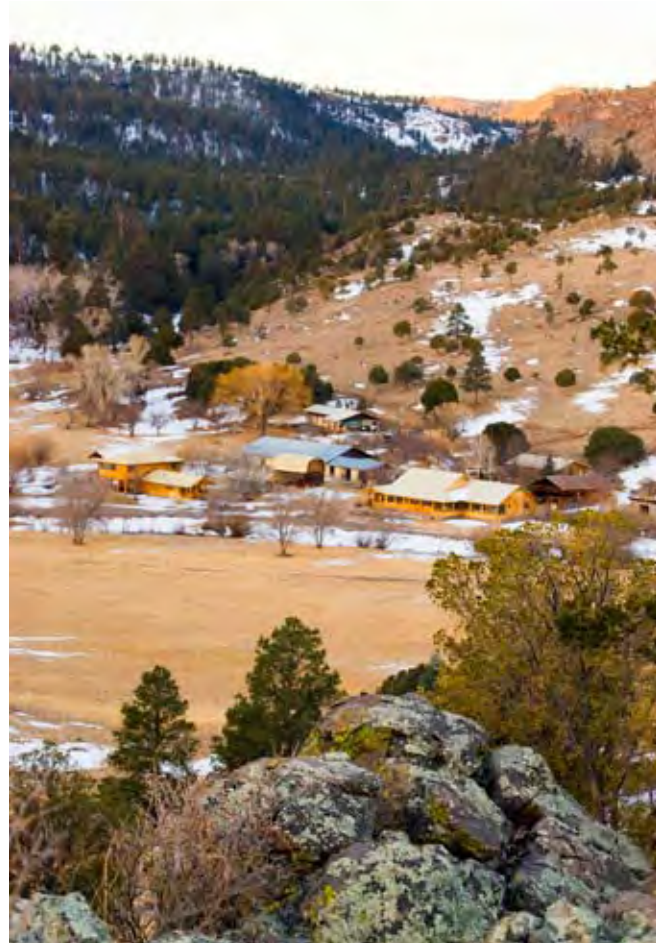
ranching—and the open space, local food production, and communities it fosters—lasts in the region. For her, that's a mission with a large purpose, and a very personal one too. "Why," she asks, "would I want to live anywhere else?"

Wink Crigler: "On Christmas Day of 1886, the original homesteader on this home property was shot and killed in a gunfight. The newspaper called it "holiday jollification down in Springerville." It wasn't long after that that my great-grandfather came into this canyon and took up farming efforts. So the family itself has been on the property since the early 1890s. My grandparents, John and Molly, were pretty much responsible for creating the ranch proper, and operated that in conjunction with Molly Butler Lodge in the Greer Valley, just four miles upstream from the ranch headquarters. It's been a family operation since those times.

"When it became my full responsibility to perpetuate this heritage, it was necessary for me to figure out some way to keep the ranch properties intact and maintain their integrity, and still make them economically viable. We began on a very, very small scale, entering into the tourist business. That all started with a gentleman that came here who suggested that we do a riparian restoration project on the river, which had suffered greatly from a flood here in 1967–68. These were raw banks. That was just a sharp undercut bank; now you can see how the vegetation has come down. It has stabilized the bank and cleared up the water. There's been a significant increase in the trout population. When we started, there probably

weren't ten fish in the whole thing. There was just pretty much a zero trout population. And now we have a nice brown and rainbow population.

"As it began to become well known as a fine, blue-ribbon fly fishery, people began being interested in spending some time here. The demand began to grow. It also began to help me realize an avenue for retaining the ranch as a ranch property, with sort of a secondary economic base. Fortunately, that's worked out well.



"I only run about 225 cows now. Sixty percent of what I'm allotted by the Forest Service is the average number that I run. I've found that if you run full number, then pretty soon you use up all of your flexibility. It's kind of like your paycheck: if you save a little back and you have a bad month, then you can still be a little flexible.

"Our ranch runs from about 7,500 to 9,600 feet elevation, right to the foothills of Mount Baldy, and real close to Big Lake. In general, higher elevations are summer grazing. You'd better be looking at turning around and starting to head back down into the lower elevations by the fifteenth of September, because those higher elevations could be subject to snow at any time after that. But it's a lot harder than it used to be. [The town of] Greer has just expanded; the residences have expanded out. Typically, the cattle followed a lot of the old stock driveways. We can't even follow 'em anymore. I truck my cattle now, from lower country to the higher country in the spring. We never did that before. We went pasture to pasture to pasture, elevation to elevation to elevation. Now we only go so far, then we've gotta jump over the people.

"I always tell kids, 'Everything you have, comes from the land.' Once you give it up, once it's disturbed and destroyed, it'll never come back. People need to realize that. I do lots of bus tours here. One time I asked this little girl, 'If you lived here on this land, what would you do?'

"I'd just build big houses,' she said.

"That's the mentality. When I do a tour, I ask, 'What's your favorite food?' They'll answer anything from pizza to a peach, to spaghetti, to hamburger, to French fries.

"Then I say, 'Where does that come from?'

"Safeway,' they'll answer. Or McDonald's. Wherever.

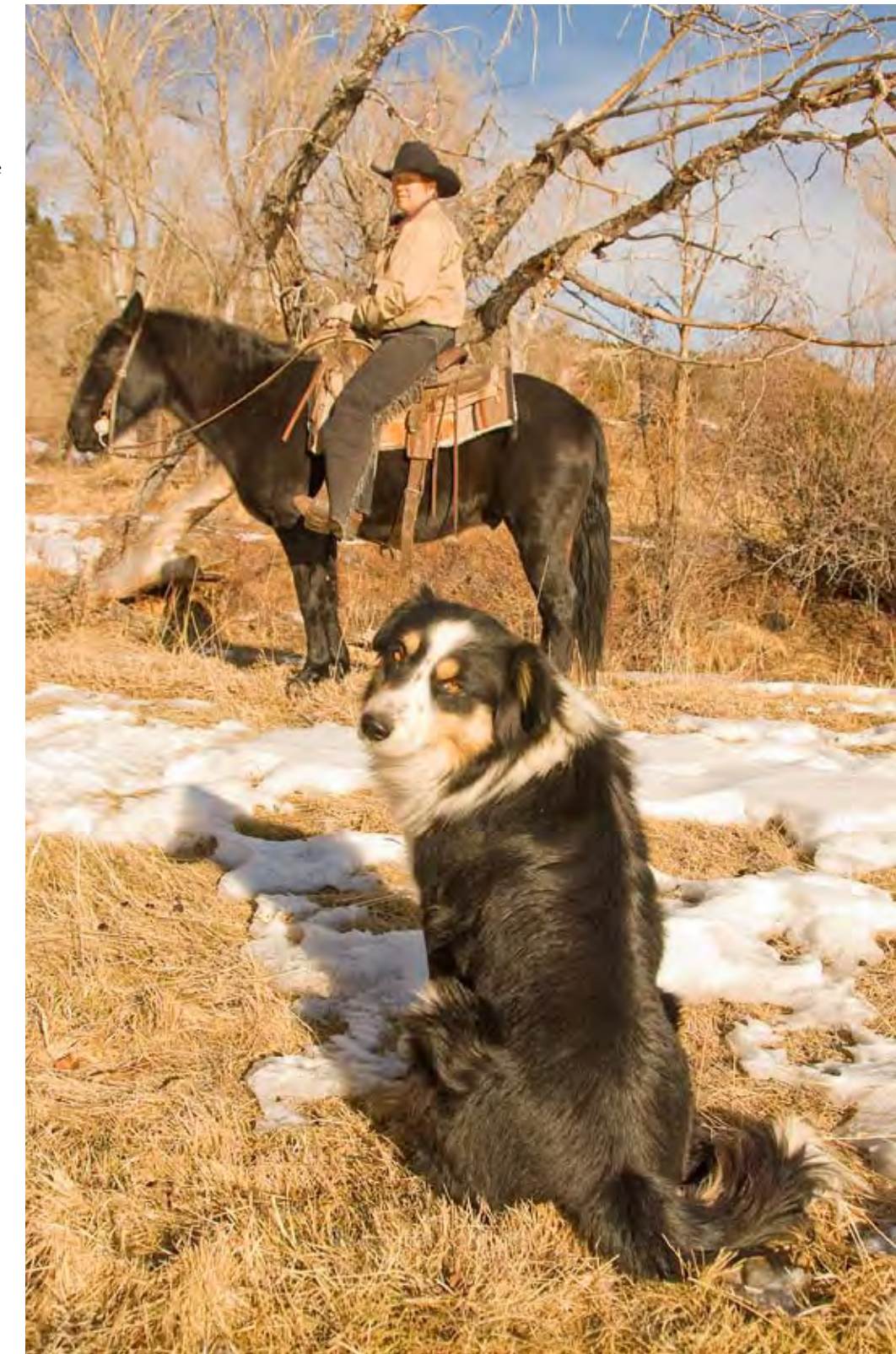
"It takes a lot of questions before kids can really get back to where something comes from, what really produces your favorite food. It's never the land. There's ninety-nine middlemen before they're ever made to think of the land.

"I'm always glad that I had the opportunity to live when I did. Quite frankly, my dad had many opportunities to sell this land for what was then a lot of money. My dad always said, 'Sell a cow, sell your corn'—we used to raise potatoes, corn. 'Sell your calves, sell your corn. Never sell your land, because if you do, you'll spend the money, and soon you'll have naught.' He never sold. And I guess that's why we're still here."

Peter Friederici teaches journalism at Northern Arizona University.

This interview is an excerpt from NAU's Ecological Oral Histories project, a collection of interviews with regional residents that focus on environmental change. More interviews and photographs from the project are available in the new book *What Has Passed and What Remains: Oral Histories of Northern Arizona's Changing Landscapes* (University of Arizona Press, 2010) and at a new exhibit of the same name at Flagstaff's Pioneer Museum. For more information about the project, see www.WhatHasPassed.org.

Photos of Wink Crigler and the X Diamond Ranch are by Dan Boone and Ryan Belnap, photographers at NAU's Bilby Research Center.





Is Forever Possible?

ROSE HOUK

FOR SOME, PRESERVATION MEANS FOREVER. But is it possible?

Three very different places in the Southwest—Pipe Spring, Hubbell Trading Post, and Rainbow Bridge—were all declared national monuments over the last century, each deemed worthy of protection for significant scenic or historic values. Yet these places are not preserved like fossils in amber. Each has its own narrative that continues to be reshaped by larger forces beyond lines on a map. And while this means the challenges of preservation become more complex, the stories of each place also grow richer.

HISTORY WRITTEN IN WATER: PIPE SPRING

ON ENTERING THE VISITOR CENTER at Pipe Spring National Monument, one of the first things you see displayed are three water containers. First is a smooth ceramic jug of ancient vintage. Second a Paiute woven basket with carrying handles and a coating of pitch. And third, a wooden water cask used by Mormon pioneers. These three vessels embody Pipe Spring's history, written by the presence of water.

This national monument sits in far northern Arizona, but just by a hair. In nearly every way, its heritage belongs to Utah. What Pipe Spring preserves is an important piece of the settling of the Southwest, and the ongoing story of how different cultures have played a role.

Ancestral Puebloans, Southern Paiutes, and Navajos were the early residents, taking advantage of the springs emerging from the base of the Vermilion Cliffs. They built their homes, planted gardens, harvested nature's stores, traded, and raided. To the Kaibab Paiute, Pipe Spring is Matungwa'va, Yellow Dripping Rock.

In 1776, when Spanish friars Dominguez and Escalante passed through the Arizona Strip, the Paiutes generously showed them the way. A hundred years later a new group arrived, forever altering the lives of the indigenous people. They were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Mormon convert James Whitmore gained title to Pipe Spring in 1863. He built a simple dugout shelter, cultivated fruit, and ran livestock over the rich grasslands. Three years later, Whitmore and his partner were killed by Native Americans (possibly Navajos), but Mormon militia avenged their deaths by taking the lives of several local Paiutes.

Mormon Church leader Brigham Young then sent a new recruit to Pipe Spring. Anson Perry Winsor arrived in 1870 with his wife Emmeline. They helped build a stone fort as defense against Indian raids, though the structure never had to be put to the test. Instead it became a ranch house for those who ran the Mormon livestock herd. With walls of seventeen-inch-thick, hand-hewn sandstone, two stories with balconies that look down on an open courtyard, and heavy wooden gates, the fort became known as Winsor Castle. From the lookout tower, a person could see a horseman coming from "four days out."

The "north house" was positioned directly on top of the largest spring, which was then channeled into a trough in the spring room of the south building, where milk, butter, and cheese were kept cool. Today, visitors touring the fort can still hear the trickling water and enjoy a delicious respite on a hot summer day, just as Pipe Spring pioneers must have done.

A host of travelers stopped for a refreshing drink of that water—and if they were lucky, a slice of apple pie fresh out of the oven or a Saturday night dance. Among them were pathfinder Jacob Hamblin, Major John Wesley Powell and his surveyors, gold prospectors, cattlemen, and Mormon newlyweds on their

way to the temple in St. George to seal their marriages. For a time, the fort also served as refuge for multiple wives of Mormon polygamists. In the late 1880s Flora Woolley, second wife of E. D. Woolley, had windows put in to relieve the feeling of what she called her "prison."

The twentieth century saw the end of church ownership, when Jonathan Heaton and sons bought the place in 1906. A year later the Kaibab Paiute Reservation was established, surrounding Pipe Spring.

In the early 1920s, a VIP stopped in at Pipe Spring, altering its history once again. Stephen Mather, director of the fledgling National Park Service, was touring the new parks in southern Utah. At Pipe Spring, he enjoyed customary local hospitality and became fascinated with the fort's history. A staunch booster, Mather also saw Pipe Spring as a welcome stop for tourists making the grand circle of the parks. He formed a

personal bond too, the kind of serendipity that can shape destiny as much as any world-shaking event. Mather's deputy Horace Albright explained that his boss wanted Pipe Spring made a national monument: "It was historic and also, of course, it was part of his program of cooperating with the Mormons. They didn't want it destroyed; they wanted it kept. Mather was very strong with the Mormons. He used to go down and sing with them; he had a beautiful baritone voice. . . ."



Facing: A view of Winsor Castle, Pipe Spring National Monument. Photo by George H. H. Huey. Above: Western Cottage Organ in the parlor of Winsor Castle, Pipe Spring National Monument. Photo by Fred Hirschmann.



peregrino

peregrine

flies high over Uintah, La Sal, Chuska, and Jemez Mountains,
soars quietly over Chaco Canyon,
Canyon de Chelly, Zion Canyon,
rides winds over Cortez, Kayenta, Zuni. . .

Language carries a history rich from frequent encounters and conquests, some languages like English gobbling up new vocabulary at a ferocious rate. It is little wonder, then, that American English carries so many heritages in its vocabulary. Words and names—names of places, names of people—carry history forward. *Peregrino*, peregrine falcon, comes from the Spanish. *Zopilote*, buzzard, is a Nahuatism borrowed into the Spanish of Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado from Nahuatl, the language of the Aztec and Tlaxcalan empires. Because thousands of Christianized Nahuatl-speaking Indians constituted the bulk of the “Spanish” who flowed into the Southwest, their contributions flavor the Spanish of the region. Spanish language influence can also be seen in place names such as La Sal (salt) Mountains and Cortez, located in Montezuma County. This latter combination reminds us of an event that changed the history of the Americas—the conquest of Montezuma’s empire by Cortes and the Spanish conquistadores in the early 1500s, and shows the region’s ties to Mexico. (The name *Mexico* is a Nahuatl word meaning “nectar from the navel or center of the Maguey plant.”)

Peregrine falcon. Photo by Darren Baker/Shutterstock.