Following a long climb up the North Kaibab Trail from the depths of the Grand Canyon, the Arizona Trail finally reaches the North Rim. To the south is Bright Angel Point, one of the Canyon’s best viewpoints, and the location of the historic Grand Canyon Lodge. During its early National Park days, the North Rim received far fewer visitors than the South Rim, due to its isolation, and retained its wilderness character. By the early 1900’s, however, the Union Pacific Railroad was seeking a successful Grand Canyon tourist enterprise of its own, like the one the Santa Fe Railroad had created on the South Rim. The Union Pacific hired William Wylie, who had created a successful tent camp for tourists at Yellowstone National Park, to do the same at the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. William put his daughter Elizabeth Wylie McKee in charge of the new “Wylie Way” tent camp at Bright Angel Point, and the Union Pacific took charge of driving tourists to the Wylie Way camp from their tracks in Utah. In 1927, the National Park Service contracted with the Union Pacific Railroad and the Utah Parks Company to build Grand Canyon Lodge at Bright Angel Point. Constructed from the surrounding Kaibab Limestone and locally harvested logs, the structure was designed to blend in with the natural surroundings. A number of cabins of similar appearance were built near the lodge for guests. The Grand Canyon Lodge was destroyed by fire in 1932, rebuilt in 1936, and ownership of it was given to the National Park Service in 1972. Today, the Grand Canyon Lodge continues to serve as the center of North Rim tourism.

Another early tourism promoter at the North Rim was Edwin Dilworth Wooley, also known as “Uncle Dee.” In 1903, Wooley hired his son-in-law David Rust to build a trail from the North Rim down to the Colorado River, where Rust would build a tourist camp. This trail would follow an old Native American route down through the cliffs, near the head of Bright Angel Creek. The trail was finished by 1907, and the pair had constructed the “Uncle Dee Wooley Cabin” at the top of the trail, where guests would stay the night before making the journey to Rust’s Camp. Wooley and Rust’s Grand Canyon Transportation Company, although a summer-only venture due to the heavy winter snows on the North Rim, was a success. During his 1913 visit to the Grand Canyon, former president Theodore Roosevelt lodged at Rust’s Camp in the bottom of the Grand Canyon. Today, the Arizona Trail and the North Kaibab Trail follow Wooley and Rust’s old route in many places.

Leaving the Canyon’s edge, this passage of the Arizona Trail immediately descends to picturesque Harvey Meadow. In the summer of 1872, explorer John Wesley Powell and Professor Harvey DeMotte were traveling through this spot on another Grand Canyon expedition. Both this meadow and a long valley near the north end of this passage, DeMotte Park, were named for the Professor. Thompson Canyon is the drainage that feeds Harvey Meadow, and it takes its name from Professor Almon Thompson, the expedition’s topographical map maker. Thompson considered the presence of the expedition’s young artist, Thomas Moran, a hindrance to their scientific work. Moran would go on to become one of the most celebrated landscape painters of the American West.
The Arizona Trail continues northward, through forests just as scenic and lightly traveled as they were in centuries past. During the 19th century, one particular criminal enterprise took advantage of this lightly traveled aspect. This enterprise was a gang of horse thieves that would steal horses in Utah, change their brands, and then drive them south into the lonely wilderness of the North Rim. The horse thieves would cross the Grand Canyon using the Nankoweap and Tanner Trails, and then sell their stolen horses to buyers in northern Arizona. For the return trip, the gang would repeat the process by stealing horses in northern Arizona and then selling them in Utah. The Nankoweap Trail, a primitive and rugged route that descends into a remote area below the North Rim, was an old Native American route used to access the Nankoweap Basin along the Colorado River. During the winter of 1882-1883, John Wesley Powell organized a geologic expedition to the Grand Canyon. The expedition members rebuilt the Nankoweap Trail as they descended along its route, studying the area’s complex geology as they went.

Near the northern end of this passage, the Arizona Trail climbs out of DeMotte Park, and crests a gentle ridge near the North Rim Lookout fire tower. Built out of steel in 1928, and originally located at Bright Angel Point, the fire tower was moved to its current location in 1933 by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Author and environmental activist Edward Abbey spent four years spotting fires from the North Rim Lookout, and this experience inspired him to write his novel *Black Sun*. This fire tower is listed on the National Historic Lookout Register.

References


