Passage 40 of the Arizona Trail follows shallow canyons northward for a few miles to what is informally known as the “East Rim” of the Grand Canyon, where one can enjoy distant views of House Rock Valley and the colorful Vermilion Cliffs. Arizona Trail users might be surprised to encounter American Bison or “buffalo” while traveling this area of the Kaibab Plateau. Uncle Jim and Charles Jesse “Buffalo” Jones started a project in 1906 to create and market a bison-cow hybrid, known as “cattalo.” While the pair did manage to bring bison to the North Rim, their hybridization project proved to be a failure, as no male cattalo were born. Uncle Jim sold the bison herd to the state of Arizona, and the Arizona Game and Fish Department began managing the growing herds in 1929. Increasing numbers of bison have migrated from the House Rock Valley wildlife area in recent years to take up residence in the forests of the North Rim. Northern Arizona is believed to be on the southwestern periphery of the bison’s historic range.

While mining, ranching, and farming were the top moneymaking ventures in most of Arizona, many who came to settle at the Grand Canyon turned to tourism for their livelihood. One of the earliest forms of tourism on the Kaibab plateau was hunting. Brigham Young’s son John solicited the help of showman Buffalo Bill Cody in starting a hunting guide service on the Kaibab Plateau, and other guiding services soon followed. James “Uncle Jim” Owens guided president Theodore Roosevelt and author Zane Grey on mountain lion hunts in 1903 and 1908, respectively. A number of other wealthy patrons seeking big game hunting adventure flocked to the open meadows and rolling forests along this passage of the Arizona Trail.

When President Theodore Roosevelt established the Grand Canyon Game Reserve in 1906, the Forest Service named Uncle Jim as its game warden. Owens had previously been a game warden at Yellowstone National Park, and a rancher in Texas. Game management in the early 20th century often included eliminating predators, which Uncle Jim was adept at. Sources vary widely as far as how many mountain lions he actually killed, but upwards of 500 is the most commonly mentioned figure. The walls of Uncle Jim’s cabin were covered in mountain lion hides and claws.

The Arizona Trail bends northwest as it leaves the East Rim, and soon crosses a broad ridge into Tater Canyon. Farther up Tater Canyon is the historic V.T. Ranch Hotel, located in the beautiful meadow of DeMotte Park, along State Highway 67. In the early 1920’s, William Slauson Rust began constructing a guest lodge on the site of the abandoned 1880’s-era V.T. Ranch, using lumber cut from a sawmill he had set up near Jacob Lake. An old Forest Service barn and scores of cabins were incorporated into the lodge complex, which was completed in 1926. The Rust family had built the North Rim’s first “real” hotel and a successful tourism enterprise from the ground up, but the Great Depression forced them to sell in 1936. The V.T. Ranch Hotel was renamed Kaibab Lodge, and remains in operation today.
The last few miles of this passage follows the route of State Highway 67, as it makes its way north to Jacob Lake. The Forest Service constructed the first real road into the area in 1913, winding south from Jacob Lake to Bright Angel Point on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. In the 1930’s, this road was improved and became modern State Highway 67.

References


