The beginning of this, the northernmost passage of the Arizona Trail, begins by crossing the route of an old Mormon road between Arizona and Utah. It was near here in 1886 that an elderly couple, Samuel Clevenger and his wife, had stopped to camp out for the night along with their hired hand. Sometime during the night, the hired hand murdered the couple and made off with their belongings. The couple were later found buried here, and the drainage nearby became known as “Deadman.” The Arizona Trail crosses Dead Man Canyon about a mile into this passage.

The first written record of travelers in this area dates back to the late Spanish era. In 1776, Franciscan priests Silvestre Escalante and Francisco Dominguez left Santa Fe on a journey to establish a trade route with Mission San Gabriel, near the future site of Los Angeles. Their journey took them through southwestern Colorado and into Utah. By the time they reached the Great Salt Lake, they had become discouraged and resolved to return to Santa Fe. At this point, Escalante and Dominguez turned south toward the Grand Canyon area. Entering the northwestern corner of what would later become Arizona, their journey took them eastward across the Arizona Strip, where they crossed the future route of the Arizona Trail. Escalante and Dominguez crossed the Colorado River at a site known as “Vados de Los Padres,” where Lake Powell is now located, visited the Hopi villages, and returned to Santa Fe. In 1829 Antonio Armijo established what was later referred to as the “Old Spanish Trail,” a major trade route between Los Angeles and Santa Fe, using the route that Escalante and Dominguez had pioneered. In 2002, Congress designated this route as the Old Spanish National Historic Trail.

The elevated area along this passage was known as Buckskin Mountain, and historically was prime hunting ground for the Southern Paiutes and the Navajo. During the 1870’s, Mormon settlers began constructing a road network across Buckskin Mountain in this area, that they would ultimately use to migrate into northern Arizona for the purpose of colonizing there. Once Mormons had successfully colonized northern Arizona, one of their wagon routes through this area became known as the “Honeymoon Trail.” The Honeymoon Trail connected the Mormon settlements along the Little Colorado River in north-central Arizona to the town of St. George in southwestern Utah. Young Mormon couples in Arizona that were engaged to be married would often travel this trail to the Mormon temple in St. George, in order to be properly “sealed” together in marriage there. The round-trip journey would often last several months, but many young couples made the trip, beginning in the 1880’s. The Honeymoon Trail crossed the Colorado River at Lee’s Ferry, wound along the base of the spectacular Vermilion Cliffs, climbed onto Buckskin Mountain, passed through Kanab, Pipe Spring, and other resupply points and water stops on the way to St. George. When other Mormon temples were constructed in Arizona, the need to travel a great distance to St. George ended, and the Honeymoon Trail became a thing of the past.

The high plains of the Arizona Strip attracted a number of ranchers during the late 19th century. Competition was high to lay claim to the best grazing areas. Large ranches
eventually replaced the smaller ones, and one ranch, the Grand Canyon Cattle Company, grazed over 100,000 head of cattle in the area. With so many cattle grazing on a largely arid landscape, the rangeland was soon severely damaged from overgrazing. Grazing regulations began to be enforced in the area by the 1880’s.

Around the halfway point of this passage, the trail bends northeast to make it final descent down North Larkum Canyon, to the valley below. Set below beautiful red rock cliffs, Coyote Valley was originally known as House Rock Valley, for the large house-like rock many miles to the south that served as a landmark for early travelers on horseback or wagon. It is here that the Arizona Trail comes to an end, where the “Grand Canyon State” of Arizona meets the “Beehive State” of Utah, among juniper trees and red sandstone domes.

References


