Wild Gardens of Acadia

508.73

SIEUR DE MONTS PUBLICATIONS

XIV

Two National Monuments:
The Desert and the Ocean Front.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

AN ARTIST IN ZION

ZION NATIONAL MONUMENT

GEORGE BUCKNAM DORR

Custodian, Sieur de Monts National Monument

In the summer of 1902 I found myself one August afternoon, when corn was ripe and grapes were ripening, starting out on horseback from the Mormon village of Kanab, where the Kanab river issues from the Vermilion Cliffs onto the Antelope Plains, to find what geologists familiar with the West had told me was one of its most wonderful sights, the Zion Creek canyon of the north fork of the Virgin River. That canyon has now become a national monument, Zion by name; while the island on the coast of Maine which I had left some weeks before to seek that region has become, in its main mountain range, a national monument also, the Sieur de Monts.

These two monuments, each in its own way a natural park of supreme landscape interest, exhibit remarkably in their difference the extraordinary range of natural scenery that the National Park Service, step by step, is reaching out to cover. What the Sieur de Monts Monument is and stands for, other papers in this series tell; in contrast, it seems worth while to tell of its far-off companion whose surrounding is the desert, beautiful as the ocean in its way, and whose sculptor has been not ice and ocean, as the Sieur de Monts, but a stream, plunging steeply down to lose its waters in the western ocean.

The immense solitudes of that region, heightened only in effect by their occasional life, dominate the impression

ZION CREEK, THE SCULPTOR OF THE MONUMENT

that it makes of wildness and primeval character. To the east and south, with an amazing exhibition of ancient volcanism in between, the Colorado River—seeming a mere thread in that vast landscape—lies sunk and inaccessible in its mile-deep canyon. To the west lies Nevada, sterile for lack of moisture, robbed by the Sierras; to the north, that remarkable interior valley of the Utah Basin, whose waters, like those of the Jordan, never reach the sea.

It is a region of strange contrasts of sterility and life in the plant world. The land that water reaches blossoms like a garden; what water fails to reach is desert.

Soon after I and my companions on the journey left Kanab that August afternoon we feasted—not wisely but too well upon my part—at invitation of the owner on watermelons growing in an irrigated garden that our way led past; for we were “travellers in a thirsty land.” Later we rode on, through dusk at first and then through a wonderful moonlight which lighted up long plumes of silver sage on either side our trail, to an old Mormon fort and place of springs, where we threw our bedding on the ground and slept.

Soon after dawn we rode away again across the plains and on till noon, without meeting anyone or seeing any trace of human habitation. At noon we reached a wide, shallow pool, thirty or forty acres in extent—a gathered run-off of the spring-time rains—one part of which as we rode down toward it appeared blood-red by reflection from the neighboring Vermilion Cliffs; the other, blue, in sharp contrast, from the sky. In this, wild range-cattle stood, knee-deep, drinking and cooling themselves.

There we lunched in the shadow of the canvas-covered “Prairie Schooner” which carried our supplies; then mounted and rode on. The way was long ahead, and the horses were urged on at a jog trot. Presently I dropped behind with what seemed at the moment but a touch of

NOON REST ON THE ANTELOPE PLAINS—SADDLES LIE ON THE GROUND
THE HORSES ARE WATERING

WATERING AT NOON ON THE ANTELOPE PLAINS
From Kodak Pictures Taken by the Writer in 1902

indigestion, but which later proved the forerunner of a sharp and sudden illness, similar to ptomaine poisoning. The others, unaware, passed on and out of sight, and I remained alone—becoming presently quite desperately ill. Later, recovering and following their trail, I came to the cattle-trodden bottom of a dried-up pool in which, unknown to me, the trail divided, and I turned—wrongly for the point I aimed at—down between two mountain masses toward the setting sun.

Daylight passed into starlit evening, and evening into moonlit night while still my horse and I wound down into the valley, spreading out—dim and mysterious—beyond. In it, far away, lights as of human habitation seemed to glimmer, then vanished to reappear again elsewhere—illusions of the night; and occasionally I heard the cry of some wild animal, a cougar once or twice, and hunting coyotes with their wild pack-laughter. Huge rock shapes loomed spectrally against the sky to right or left as I descended; clusters of silver sage shone white in the moonlight here and there beside the trail, like marble ruins; and where the wet season or occasional cloudburst streams, whose waters gather with incredible speed, had made their way, darkly shadowed cuts were flung across the trail or followed down beside it. Late in the evening, reaching one of these, the trail divided, one branch crossing it and the other passing down its side. I took the one that crossed and later found that had it been the other, the desert only would have lain before me.

Midnight came and neither my horse nor I had had food or water for a dozen hours; he grew exhausted, and I had finally to dismount and lead him. At length I came to the river, but sunk in a rocky bed too deep to reach. Gradually, as I followed it along, it rose to the trail level; and the trail soon after seemed to enter it. Crossing, upon the chance it was a ford, I found myself suddenly,

ROAD IN VIRGIN RIVER VALLEY LEADING TO THE MONUMENT

at half past one at night, in a little sleeping village, lit by the moon but absolutely silent. Each house was set in a luxuriant garden, watered by an irrigating stream led down the village midst. Continuing on until I reached again the river at an upper bend without discovering any sign of life, I turned and approached a house, whose owner, being waked and told of a stranger who had lost his way, promptly double-barred his door and sent me on. But presently, through the kind offices of the postmaster, whose residence I ascertained through the barred door, I found myself entertained with kindest hospitality, my horse turned loose in an enclosure to feed at will on stacked alfalfa hay, and I provided with a great bowl of bread and milk while my host and his whole family—risen for the occasion—sat round to hear of my adventure, and tell in turn of others who had lost their way in that wide wilderness.

The next day, gladdened by a morning sight of those well cultivated gardens, filled with late summer fruits and vegetables, with grapes and the tall stalks of sugarcane and corn, and set with apple-trees and fig-trees, peach-trees and thick-foliaged mulberries, I rode on up the river and joined my companions at another village, a dozen miles above; and then rode on with them into the canyon we had come to see.

It was well worth the coming; a great "intaglio," two thousand feet or more in depth, cut by the river into deep red sandstone that rose sheer from the level bottom of the valley in great rounded cliffs. Above, strangely contrasting with it, rose great cones of sandstone of the weird gray color of the Austrian Dolomites, softer in texture and too steep and smooth to harbor vegetation. A sandy soil covered the valley bottom, deposited by the river in its times of flood; trees grew over it, and open patches here and there had been planted to corn by people from the villages below. The color of the sandstone was extraordinarily rich and beautiful,

ZION CREEK CANYON FROM THE RIM ABOVE

contrasting finely with the green foliage below, the pale gray cones and the blue sky above. The valley, too, had breadth enough to obviate the effect of sombre gloom that canyons often have, deep cuts where water in its swing has not had time to cut a wider swathe. Sunlight entered here abundantly, lighting its walls' rich tones and showing the beauty of their weathered faces.

One memory I have always cherished. A spring of water, rare in that region and delightful always, issued—at some distance from the valley floor—from a long crack or crevice in the sandstone, and, rooted in the rock-face below, draping and hiding it, there grew a splendid curtain of Maidenhair fern with magnificent fronds and long wiry stems that allowed the fronds to freely over-lap, while the water dropped and trickled through the mass to gather at the cliff-foot finally and flow away. The rich color-contrast of the fronds and rock, the fresh green hue and splendid vigor of the fronds themselves, and the delight of the water dripping quietly down made an impression on me in that arid region which is as fresh to-day as then.

That night we slept on the sandy valley floor, where I remember the swift passage of the stars against the cliffs, then being waked at dawn by ants, tiny but innumerable, whom I found attacking me in two apparently well organized and well directed columns, one on either side; and I remember, too, finding when I rose the tracks of a night-prowling coyote in the sand between me and my next sleeping neighbor, not half a dozen feet away.

Where we slept that night and watched the breaking of the dawn, the canyon opened grandly out as if for the enthronement of some ancient god, and there, from its deep embayment, rose a dangerous and only trail connecting the canyon bottom with the plains above—a summer-grazing ground for cattle, whose bones marked, like vestiges of ancient sacrifice, the bases of the cliffs it climbed.

ON HORSEBACK IN ZION

Beyond this amphitheater, the canyon narrowed quickly, keeping still its depth and perpendicular walls, till finally the river wholly filled its bottom, scarce thirty feet in width, and the sky was hidden overhead in places by the projecting cliffs.

The rock is a superb deep-red Triassic sandstone, capped by a softer gray Jurassic, and it is the singularly homogeneous character of these ancient wind-deposits that gives them such extraordinary massiveness of cliff and dome in wasting to the sea.

For these are wind deposits, built up by the gales that swept across a desert land ages ago and buried the broad ocean-litoral that bordered it beneath thousands of feet of clean, wind-sifted sand. There is nothing like them elsewhere, in scale or clear-cut exhibition of the force of wind. The gales that built them up must have blown for millions of years across that desert land before the sea engulfed them, as it later did, to be again hove up still later and form a portion of our present continent.

The ancient litoral on which they lie, laid bare in places by the Virgin River and in these tributary canyons, shows isolated beds of salt and gypsum where once salt marshes lay, sea shells, and over these, in beds of later date, numerous remains of trees allied in type to the vanishing Sequoia group now making its last stand along the western slopes of the Sierra Mountains and on the coast of northern California. They are wonderful relics of the past that should be guarded at all cost.

The Vermilion Cliffs—washed by the Colorado River once, now sunk a mile below and forty-odd away in a new bed—and the red walls of Zion Creek are formed of these wind-blown sands, impregnated with iron which cements and tinges them; the gray rock above, seen from the canyon, is formed of them also but without the iron.

Zion Monument now is easy of approach. A short motor ride across the desert, where the morning and

WHERE THE CANYON NARROWS

the evening lights are beautiful and dust-whirls rise at noon in the hot sun to drift like dancing dervishes across the plain, takes one to it from the Lund Station on the Salt Lake route connecting Los Angeles with Salt Lake City. The West affords no single geological feature, save the Grand Canyon only, better worth a visit.

SIEUR DE MONTS PUBLICATIONS

- I. Announcement by the Government of the creation of the
Sieur de Monts National Monument by Presidential
Proclamation on July 8, 1916.
- II. Addresses at Meeting held at Bar Harbor on August 22, 1916,
to commemorate the establishment of the Sieur de Monts
National Monument.
- III. The Sieur de Monts National Monument as a Bird Sanctuary.
- IV. The Coastal Setting, Rocks and Woods of the Sieur de Monts
National Monument.
- V. An Acadian Plant Sanctuary.
- VI. Wild Life and Nature Conservation in the Eastern States.
- VII. Man and Nature. Our Duty to the Future.
- VIII. The Acadian Forest.
- IX. The Sieur de Monts National Monument as commemorating
Acadia and early French influences of Race and Settle-
ment in the United States.
- X. Acadia: the Closing Scene.
- XI. Purchas Pilgrimes translation of de Monts' Commission.
De Monts: an Appreciation.
- XII. The de Monts Ancestry in France.
- XIII. The District of Maine and the Character of the People of
Boston at the end of the 18th century.
- XIV. Two National Monuments: The Desert and the Ocean Front.
- XV. Natural Bird Gardens on Mount Desert Island.
- XVI. The Blueberry and other characteristic plants of the Acadian
Region.
- XVII. The Sieur de Monts National Monument and its Historical
Associations. Garden Approaches to the National Monu-
ment.
The White Mountain National Forest.
Crawford Notch in 1797.
- XVIII. An Old Account of Mt. Washington. A Word upon its
Insect Life.
A Word on Mt. Katahdin.
- XIX. National Parks and Monuments.
- XX. Early Cod and Haddock Fishery in Acadian Waters.
- XXI. The Birds of Oldfarm: an intimate study of an Acadian
Bird Sanctuary.
- XXII. The Sieur de Monts National Monument and The Wild
Gardens of Acadia.

These Publications may be obtained by writing to

THE CUSTODIAN,

Sieur de Monts National Monument,
Bar Harbor, Maine.