

Grand Canyon National Park's Ranger Audio Tour
Grand Canyon Lodge

Grand Canyon Lodge is the most intact rustic hotel development remaining in the national parks from the era when railroads constructed "destination resorts." The lodge you see today is only a shadow of its former glory. Architect Gilbert Stanley Underwood who also built the Ahwahnee in Yosemite, designed Grand Canyon Lodge as a two-story building with a massive three story tower. The original lodge was built during the fall/winter of 1927-28 and involved unusual difficulties and hardships for the workmen and their families.

Hurray, it's June of '28! We have finally finished building the lodge and thirty, two-room log sleeping cabins on time. The lodge seems to rise out of the cliff on which it stands. What a feat and what a story! It all began in the fall of '27.

I'm George Wood, the Utah Parks Company construction foreman overseeing the building of Grand Canyon Lodge. I supervise 125 men. Carpenters and masons earn 85 cents an hour; truck drivers 75 cents and laborers 50 cents. They live in tent camps at the site with their families. Because of our isolation we have been forced to become a self-contained unit. One worker's wife baked 30 to 40 loaves of bread every day.

The rail line is two hundred miles from here so it is necessary to truck in all the materials and equipment for this job. One of the first things we did was purchase a sawmill in Kanab. We had it moved and erected on the grounds. First order of business was building a winter construction camp, then came the building of the lodge. The mill handles ponderosa saw-logs brought in from the surrounding national forest by truck. We handle them extremely fast. Trees are cut in the morning, brought to the mill, sawed into lumber and the boards are in their final resting place before sundown.

We built the lodge from native Kaibab limestone. The rock quarry is two miles north of here. The laying of building stone has almost become a lost art. Fortunately, we were able to hire a few men in Southern Utah towns who knew how to lay stone.

Back in January most of the trucking was done at night when the snow and the roadway beneath it were frozen. A large rotary snowplow propelled by a twenty ton, military surplus tank kept the dirt road open to the outside. One terrific storm required three weeks to clear forty-four miles of road.

There's no suitable sand for mixing concrete in the entire Grand Canyon. After wrecking the crusher twice, we found that frozen stone would not crush. So we kept a fire going in a long section of corrugated culvert day and night to keep the rocks warm enough to be crushed into sand.

Those were just some of the problems we encountered. There were others, but we worked as a team and overcame whatever obstacle man or nature put in our way.

The construction of North Rim facilities in such a short time under adverse conditions was a remarkable feat. Tragedy struck however four short years later on September 1, 1932. The largest structural fire in Grand Canyon's history razed the multi-storied lodge and two deluxe cabins.

Reconstruction of the main lodge began in the winter of 1936-37 until storms of unusual severity brought it to a halt. Employees had to be rescued in February. Despite the weather, the new lodge opened on June 1, 1937.

The lodge has been rebuilt using most of what remained of the stone foundation, piers, walls, and chimneys of the original building. More stone and less timber is used in the new lodge. The roof line has been changed to handle the heavy snow. According to a Utah Park Company memo the old observation tower was eliminated "because it was mostly a rendezvous for rowdies who congregated and made a noise and a disturbance and often were not guests at all." Many of the cabins in use today pre-date the new lodge!

North Rim facilities are, even more than half a century later, closed down during winter months due to the severity of its winters and depth of snowfall. Grand Canyon Lodge stands as a testament to pioneer willpower.