

The canyons and valleys of Parashant are full of rich histories of persistence, tragedy, toughness, and mystery. One such story is that of Major John Wesley Powell and his fateful first voyage down the Colorado River. Powell led the expedition into the Grand Canyon, one of the last great uncharted regions of the lower 48. The ten-man crew set out from what is now Green River, Wyoming on May 24, 1869. Not all of them, however, would make it through to journey's end three months later.

Under somber conditions on the evening of August 27, food was critically low and the crew sat at the crest of yet another set of rough looking rapids not knowing how much river remained ahead of them. Three of Powell's men, Oramel G. Howland, his brother Seneca Howland, and William Dunn, told Powell that they had had enough of the river. They determined to leave the river, climb out of the canyon, and make for the Mormon settlements to the north. The next morning, with a little food, water, and firearms, the three men left camp. They were never seen again. Powell, and his remaining comrades, pressed on for two more days before exiting the Grand Canyon and finishing their journey.

On Sept 7, 1869, a telegram arrived in St. George from an unknown sender saying that Powell's three men had been killed by Shivwits Indians five days earlier. The reports were that they had been found in an exhausted state, fed by the Shivwits, and put on the trail leading to Washington, after which they saw a squaw gathering seed and shot her. The Shivwits followed up and killed all three. The story made the newspapers and awaited Major Powell's arrival in Salt Lake City on September 15.

The following year, 1870, Powell returned to Southern Utah with an expressed intent to unravel the fate of the men, whose bodies and gear were never recovered. He and Jacob Hamblin, a local Mormon leader who was renowned for his work with the Indians, met with a group of Shivwits Indians at Mount Trumbull who claimed to have been part of the killings. With Hamblin as interpreter, the Shivwits told Powell how they had encountered three men wandering in the desert nearly starved. They told of how they fed them and put them on the road to the white settlements. Shortly thereafter, Indians from the other side of the river came in and told the Shivwits of white miners who had recently killed a squaw. They advised the Shivwits to kill the three men who had just left their camp because if they found any mines in that country, it would be bad news. The visiting Indians worked the Shivwits into a frenzy telling them no man had ever come down the river, it was impossible to do so; these men surely must be liars who were now covering their tracks; they must be the ones responsible for the murder of the squaw. Ultimately convinced, the Shivwits pursued the men and killed them in the night.

Hamblin explained the purpose of Powell's exploration to the Shivwits. They told Hamblin that Ka-pu-rats, their name for Powell meaning "one arm cut off," would be welcomed in their country for future expeditions, something Powell did the following year. Satisfied with their explanation and expressions of regret at the loss of life, Powell opted to stay the night there on Mount Trumbull.

The exact circumstances of the deaths of William Dunn, O.G. Howland, and Seneca Howland may never be known. Barring the discovery of their bodies or personal items, their entire fate is likely to have disappeared into the desert like a dust devil whirls off into the prairie. The sight you see before you is one of the last things they saw. A faint scabbled inscription on Mount Dellenbaugh, near where you stand, with the name "William Dunn 1869" and "Water" with an arrow pointing northeast, is the last known mark of the three men.

Don't open until you arrive

4. Separation Scenery

Take a picture!

N 36° 06' 32.0"

W 113° 32' 26.3"

This is a place of unknown fates.

Follow County Rd. 103 as it enters NPS administered lands and becomes NPS Rd. 1203. Locate and park in established parking area at trailhead. Requires approx. 3 mile roundtrip hike.

Difficulty: ♦♦♦♦

#FindItAtParashant