

# Them Mules

By Tennison

Photos by Western Mule Magazine



## The Bright Angel Trail

**C**oming out of a meeting Wednesday, August 13th at the Grand Canyon, the National Park Service is making plans to close the historic Bright Angle Trail to the famous Grand Canyon Mules.

The plan is to rework the South Kaibab Trail and allow mule traffic to enter the Canyon there. As soon as work on the Kaibab Trail is completed mules will no longer be allowed on the Bright Angle Trail.

All of this is due to hikers wanting a trail they can hike on that is "Well Maintained". The reason the Bright Angle trail is there at all and has always been highly maintained is because of none other than the mules themselves. The National Park Service has heard this "Squeaky Wheel" (the hikers) and we know the squeaky wheel gets the grease. The mules will be forced to take dudes down a trail that is much steeper, and will cause many mules to have to retire before their time and the South Kaibab Trail is more treacherous, no place for the dudes that ride the Grand Canyon Mules.

There is plenty of history that goes with the Bright Angel Trail. Let me give you a quick review.

The Bright Angel Trail was originally built as a mining access trail for pack mules in 1891 by Ralph and Niles Cameron. They gave up on mining and turned to tourist rides into the Canyon in the later part of the 1890's. Tourists riding mules into the Grand Canyon has been going on every since.

The Camerons held a private deed to the trail. In 1919 the National Park Service took control of the canyon and immediately began trying to wrestle control of the Bright Angel Trail from the Camerons. The National Park Service finally succeeded when they built the Kaibab Trail in 1928. This put the Cameron's trail, the Bright Angel Trail out of business and Cameron became a "willing seller" to the National Park Service.

The Fred Harvey Company got the lease to run the mule rides down into the canyon by way of the Bright Angel Trail and out of the canyon by way of the Kaibab Trail. The Fred Harvey Company is today called Xanterra, who runs the mule rides.

The south Kaibab Trail is the trail the packers have used over the years supplying Phantom Ranch at the bottom of the canyon. The south Kaibab Trail is where rookie mules learned to negotiate the canyon trails packing in supplies and packing out anything that needed to come to the top. Not all mules passed the test, there have been rookie mules that have fallen to their death on the Kaibab Trail or have caused another mule to go over the side. When the mules have learned to negotiate the Kaibab Trail, then and then only were they considered for a dude mule. The reason the Kaibab Trail was used for coming out of the canyon by the dude mules instead of going down that way was because it was believed that the Kaibab Trail was too steep and treacherous for anyone but the best of riders. From what I've seen, the majority of folks who are going down on the mules to experience the Grand Canyon, (an experience like none other) are anything but experienced riders.

I've had the pleasure of sitting with Ross Knox (long time packer for the Grand Canyon) and listening to the stories and experiences he had over the years. I believe Ross Knox would be the first to mention the Kaibab Trail ain't for no dude.

Anyone I've talked with over the years who has had anything to do with the mule operations at the Grand Canyon have always felt the Kaibab Trail was too treacherous to be suitable for in-experienced riders to ride down. I don't know it but I'll bet my best hat that opinion hasn't changed.

Little does the tax payer know there are currently over 400 miles of inner canyon trails available to the hikers that livestock are not permitted on. Now the hikers want the Bright Angel Trail. Originally all trails in the Grand Canyon were stock trails. Today only the Bright Angel and the Kaibab Trails are allowed stock. Stock has been kicked off of the other trails one by one over the decades. We have allowed it. It's time to speak-up.

Some years back Western Mule Magazine heard they were fixing to shut down outside stock to the Bright Angle and Kaibab Trails. When we brought it to your attention Western Mule Magazine readers made the calls and wrote the letters to get that action stopped. Don't you think for a minute letters and phone calls won't cause another meeting. Please don't lead yourself to believe the next person will and you don't need to, it's important that you do make the contacts and express your opinion.

It needs to start with your Congressman, but don't stop there, we need to go straight to the top, to the Department of the Interior and to the National Park Service. We have provided you with phone numbers and addresses. The squeaky wheel does get the grease. We mule owners and those who believe that such a tradition as mules in the Grand Canyon, on the Bright Angel Trail should not cease, need to let it be known that the mules need to stay on the Bright Angel Trail.

Don't let some preppie with a backpack, that has no concern for the rich history, the tradition, no loyalty to the icons of the Grand Canyon, THE MULES, have the last word. These hikers are merely offended by mule poop.

We don't only need to squeak...**WE NEED TO ROAR!**

Department of the Interior / 1849 C Street North West  
Washington D.C. 20240/phone (202) 208-3100

National Park Service Director / Mary A. Bomar  
1849 C Street North West  
Washington D.C. / phone (202) 208-6843

National Park Service  
Intermountain Regional Director Mike Snyder  
12795 Alameda PKWY  
Denver, Colorado 80225 / phone(303)969-2500

**CONTACT YOUR CONGRESSMAN!**

