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THE COVER: Painting of John Otto by Al Look on display at the Visitors' Center, Colorado National Monument. Used with permission of the Colorado National Monument.

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Painting of John Otto by Al Look

(Courtesy of Colorado National Monument Visitors' Center.)

John Otto: More Than A Misunderstood Visionary

By Steven M. Woytek*

John Otto, the person most responsible for the establishment of the Colorado National Monument, has achieved the status of folk hero in the Grand Valley. Today many people regard him as a misunderstood visionary. This article will demonstrate that from 1906 to 1934 his reputation went through three distinct stages: first, an eccentric visionary; second, a man who gained public support and then rallied that support when the local business community recognized that a national park would increase tourism and boost the local economy; and, finally, after the establishment of the Monument, a man whom officials in the Park Service regarded as too unconventional to fit comfortably into their operation. A study of John Otto reveals more than an account of an interesting man; it indicates much about how local citizens thought about wilderness and the formation of a national park.

Otto's enthusiasm for wilderness arose in the 1890s during an era when other Americans began to recognize the importance of preserving wilderness areas. Like others, John Otto's attitudes about nature moved from utilitarian concerns to the appreciation of nature. His change in attitude makes him a bellwether figure in a time when many people in an industrializing and urbanizing nation sought quiet places to escape and relax.

John Otto was born in Marthasville, Missouri, on December 30, 1879.[1] His father, Carl Emil Otto, was a pastor in Dodge County,

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Wisconsin, until he married and moved to Missouri where he taught and later became president of Eden Theological Seminary in Marthasville.[2] Carl Otto then moved to Elmhurst College in Illinois where he taught Greek, Latin, and ancient history.[3] His father's background in religion, education, and foreign languages helped Otto become an educated, diverse, and religious man.

At the age of nineteen John Otto headed west, and for ten years traveled up and down the west coast of the United States working in mines and panning for gold.[4] In Washington he met Emma W. Hausing, whose husband managed several mines in the Okonagon mining district. Mr. Hausing recognized Otto's intelligence, hired him, and assigned him to the best miner in camp to learn the intricate details of mining.[5] Hard work, attention to detail, endurance, and a willingness to volunteer for difficult tasks soon made John Otto a valuable asset to the camp.[6]

Otto's interest in mining, as well as his reputation in the field, grew. While in Yreka, California, he received a letter of endorsement from six residents proclaiming him to be a good miner and citizen with high values and integrity.[7] His reputation spread as far as Cripple Creek, Colorado, where, he was informed, labor strikes were occuring. While such things piqued his interest in Colorado, an incident in Loleta, California, detained him. While there he tried to barter his services for a new pair of overalls by offering to help the clerk around the shop. Otto held little regard for money and saw nothing unusual in the offer; thus he pursued the matter until the clerk thought him a mad man and reported him to the sheriff for not paying for the overalls he took.[8] Otto was arrested for not paying his bill and brought to trial.[9] Throughout his trial Otto answered questions and offered no resistance, but when state doctors questioned him, he never gave them direct answers because he believed that their trivial questions deserved only trivial answers. Consequently, they deemed him insane and committed him to the lunacy asylum at the Napa State Hospital in California.

Knowing he was not insane, John Otto launched a letter-writing campaign to secure his release. He wrote hundreds of lucid letters to officials and doctors outside of the institute asking that they review his case.[10] However, doctors at the Napa asylum intercepted Otto's correspondence. When he realized that his letters were not leaving the asylum, he asked to communicate with Dr. F.W. Hatch, superintendent of state hospitals. Otto prepared a letter that he believed was "most intelli-

gently written and presented to the Doctor of the Ward," but the doctors would not forward it to the superintendent.[11] Otto's stubborn persistence aggravated Dr. Stice, caretaker of Ward G, who confined Otto to his room and took away his mailing privileges.[12] Dr. Stice failed to realize that such small setbacks would not deter John Otto. Failing with the doctors and the superintendent, he got a sympathetic attendant to slip letters into the mail headed for Governor George C. Pardee. Other inmates smuggled their rations of paper and pencils to Otto so he could besiege the governor with letters.[13] The governor read his letters and encouraged him to remain patient and disciplined because the review process took time.[14] In the spring of 1903 he was released after spending half a year in the asylum.[15] Upon his release, Otto proceeded to Colorado.

Once in Colorado, John Otto spent time in Grand County mining for gold, then moved to Denver in May of 1903. While there, he wrote letters to Governor James H. Peabody about the current miners' strikes and suggested ways to settle them.[16] Otto's suggestions included ideas radical for the time—an eight-hour workday, and equal opportunity and pay for women.[17] He also criticized Governor Peabody for his unwillingness to come to acceptable terms with the miners.[18] These accusations later led him to another arrest. Otto remained in Denver until October 16, when he left with a group from Haywood's Employment Agency to mine on the Western Slope.[19]

The governor's advisors deemed Otto a threat and sent a detective from the Pinkerton Detective Bureau to follow him to Eagle, Colorado.[20] Otto continued to bombard the governor with letters. In one letter, he asked to meet with Governor Peabody to discuss ways to solve labor problems in mining. In the letter he declared: "You have practically ignored my propositions in the past, but I intend to call on you....You have got to settle it the way I say or there will be trouble, I warn you."[21] Such inflammatory rhetoric put the governor's advisors on the defensive and resulted in a plan for Otto's arrest. Back in Denver, Otto received a postcard confirming a meeting with the governor on Saturday, November 14, 1903, to discuss terms he had in mind regarding Colorado miners and their labor disputes.[22] The invitation was a trap set up by the executive secretary to the governor, Samuel H. Wood, Undersheriff Felix O'Neill, Deputy Leonard DeLue, and Detective E.E. Prettyman.[23] When Otto arrived at the governor's office he was found armed with a stiletto, arrested, and booked for attempted assault.[24]

During the interrogation Otto volunteered a great deal of information. He explained that he carried the stiletto to trim the red, white, and blue candles he burned in his hotel room window to show support for the miners' cause.[25] When the Pinkerton Detective Bureau asked about his arrest in California and his stay in the Napa Asylum, Otto said that it was all true. He also told them he had not intended to harm Governor Peabody, but that he would accept punishment in the name of socialism.[26]

Accounts of Otto's arrest, booking, interrogation, and confirmation of his sympathy for socialism appeared in *The Rocky Mountain News* and *The Denver Post.* It was reported in *The Denver Post* that Otto was upset about the defeat of legislation ensuring an eight-hour workday and that he had decided to settle the labor troubles by a "wild incoherent plan evolved by a diseased brain."[27] The same newspaper also declared: "He is mentally unbalanced, apparently as the result of over study on economical and socialistic problems."[28] Sometime later, a reporter for *The Denver Post* called Otto a "sound, healthy man...but you wouldn't contradict him unless steel bars intervened."[29] Because of his statements about labor and his stubborn character, the charges of attempted assault were dropped to insanity, and he was released.[30] Otto vowed that he would never again go farther east than Broadway Avenue, located west of the capital building.

Once released, Otto headed west, arriving in the Grand Valley in 1906.[31] He found work as a powder monkey on a crew installing a water pipeline across the Uncompaghre Plateau from Fruita to Grand Junction. The path of the pipeline ran over the present day Colorado National Monument where Otto would later embark on a once in a lifetime expedition.[32]

While involved in this work, Otto continued his battle with the new governor, Governor Buchtel, over the issue of miners' labor problems. Otto felt the governor had bought his way into office and went so far as to threaten him if he ever came to Fruita.[33] Otto expressed these feelings to Dr. R.B. Porter of Fruita, along with his aspirations to build a new church based on, "Truth, Honor, Love, and Justice."[34] Dr. Porter, nervous about Otto's threats to the governor, combined with his desire to build a church, called the sheriff to arrest him.[35] Otto challenged the sheriff to come and arrest him, which the sheriff promptly did, taking him off to jail and filing insanity charges against him.[36]

For a third, and final time, John Otto went through an insanity trial and was cleared of the charges. While awaiting trial and through-

John Otto in one of his camps with unidentified companion

(Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.)

out the hearing the county physician, Dr. Parker, observed Otto's actions and took notes on his thought processes.[37] At this time Otto's father was asked to provide a character report on his son for the jury of six.[38] Later in the trial Dr. Parker offered his opinion on Otto: although he had some strange ideas he was not dangerous or insane.[39] Dr. Parker's testimony, along with Carl Otto's character report, helped to clear him of yet another insanity case.[40] Remarkably, John Otto emerged from these three cases in the span of six years without a scratch on his self esteem or a damper on his spirits.

With the trials behind him, Otto returned to the beautiful canyons of the future Colorado National Monument to live and begin the work that would allow others to enjoy them too. While working on the pipeline, Otto explored many of the serene canyons that ran along its route. Once the pipeline was finished Otto pitched a tent in what is now Monument Canyon. He took with him his horse Dolly, two pack burros, a pick and shovel and declared himself a trail builder and canyon promoter.[41]

Forces were at work that would help Otto achieve his dream of setting aside large tracts of land for public use. Ideas from the Enlightenment, which stretched back to the eighteenth century, stressed that nature reflected the grand design and beneficent side of God.[42] The Romantic Movement, which began in the first third of the nineteenth century, added enthusiasm for the wild and untamed side of nature. These ideas brought people into the wild to admire its grandeur. Otto reflected both of these philosophies because he saw God's handiwork in nature and appreciated it most in its untamed state.

By the 1870s, a movement was gaining force that differed from the commonly held belief that expansion westward represented progress, and that areas too inhospitable for settlement were wasted and undesirable land.[43] While many Americans did not have a formal philosophical basis for their beliefs about wilderness, most believed that it offered a sanctuary from overcrowded and sometimes unsafe cities that grew too quickly and perhaps even undermined the morality and character of their inhabitants.[44] The first large-scale wilderness preservation act was constructed by Congress on March 1, 1872, when President Grant signed the bill establishing Yellowstone National Park.[45] Otto's arrival in western Colorado coincided with a growing inclination among many Americans to preserve spectacular areas of wilderness and to travel as tourists to see them.[46]

John Otto with his pack animals

(Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.)

Much of the preservationist philosophy that John Otto brought to western Colorado he had learned from John Muir. While Otto was in California, Muir lectured to different groups and submitted articles to papers such as the *Sacramento Record-Union*.[47] During this time, Muir advocated preservation of the Yosemite Valley. On September 30, 1890, the Yosemite Act was signed into law, establishing Yosemite National Park. This opened the floodgates for similar proposals in other areas.[48] Support for Muir's philosophy increased on March 3, 1891, when an amendment to the general land laws passed, allowing the president of the United States to create forest reserves and remove them from the public domain.[49] The formation of groups such as the Sierra Club in June 1891, which lobbied for protection of the Pacific coast and the Sierra Nevada mountain range, added strength to the preservation movement.[50] Muir's work had created a groundswell of support in California and Otto eventually used it as his model when he came to western Colorado and began advocating for the creation of the Colorado National Monument.

By the turn of the century people on the Western Slope held conflicting attitudes about the use of public domain. Many held a frontier philosophy, feeling that the land should be used as local people saw fit without the interference of the government. Others heralded the beginnings of concern about the preservation of scenic and historic regions. The latter arguement began to gain in popularity. The Indian ruins at Mesa Verde, for example, became a national park in 1900. The Antiquities Act, passed on June 8, 1906, enabled the president to create national monuments to protect unique historic landmarks or historic and prehistoric structures for historic and scientific interest.[51]

By the time John Otto arrived in Colorado, the necessary conditions for the establishment of the Colorado National Monument were in place; wilderness enjoyed a favorable reputation among many Americans, people aspired to venture outside and enjoy what nature had to offer, and a body of law existed to preserve and protect areas of natural beauty. Regardless, Otto faced opposition from groups on the Western Slope. Many ranchers and others believed the government had no right to restrict the use of public land. According to this mindset, a national park or monument would be acceptable only if local people had access to it for use as rangeland or other utilitarian purposes. To overcome such opposition, Otto had to sway public opinion and get the federal government behind him.

John Otto's role in the formative years of the Colorado National Monument was that of a romantic visionary. He struck a responsive cord with people in the Grand Valley when he told them again and again that they had something very special in their part of the state. He captured the imagination of many people with an unrelenting campaign to publicize the area and by building trails to make it accessible. Otto rejoiced in his role of calling attention to a natural wonder in western Colorado.

The last of the insanity trials was a line of demarcation in Otto's life. To this point, he had lived in a sometimes inflammatory manner—doing exactly as he pleased and remaining unconcerned that others might see him as eccentric or even a bit crazy. However, the next stage of Otto's career—that of a man able to sell his idea of a park to the residents of the Grand Valley—reveals that he possessed political savvy. During this stage of his life he put together a grassroots movement that resulted in the creation of the Colorado National Monument. He understood the world view of the local people well enough that he carefully couched his campaign for a national park in terms that appealed to local entities. His efforts always reflected praise for the scenic wonders of the proposed park, but Otto also combined his preservationist philosophy with the idea that economic benefits could also be realized. He understood that communities wanted improved transportation, federal money, and tourism. He was able to link progress with the park idea in ways that brought local support. While doing this, Otto worked to get Congressional support. It was a masterful balancing act on his part.

At first Otto's efforts were modest and patient, yet relentless, and eventually his work caught the eye of others. Otto's motivation to pursue these efforts came from his love of the canyons as well as the local townspeople who lacked recreational opportunities. According to some, the "most exciting thing you could do in Grand Junction was go down to the river and hang your feet over the bank."[52] Such comments prompted him to begin his work building trails around Monument Canyon.

To raise public interest and garner local support for his project, Otto knew he had to communicate with the community, inspiring and winning the support of its leaders. To do this he wrote a multitude of letters, such as the one to the editor of *The Grand Junction Daily Sentinel* informing people that he intended to make Monument Canyon a national park with a road built around the rim rock for access.[53] In 1908 the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce endorsed Otto's proposition

John Otto (pointing) with unidentified companions

(Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.)

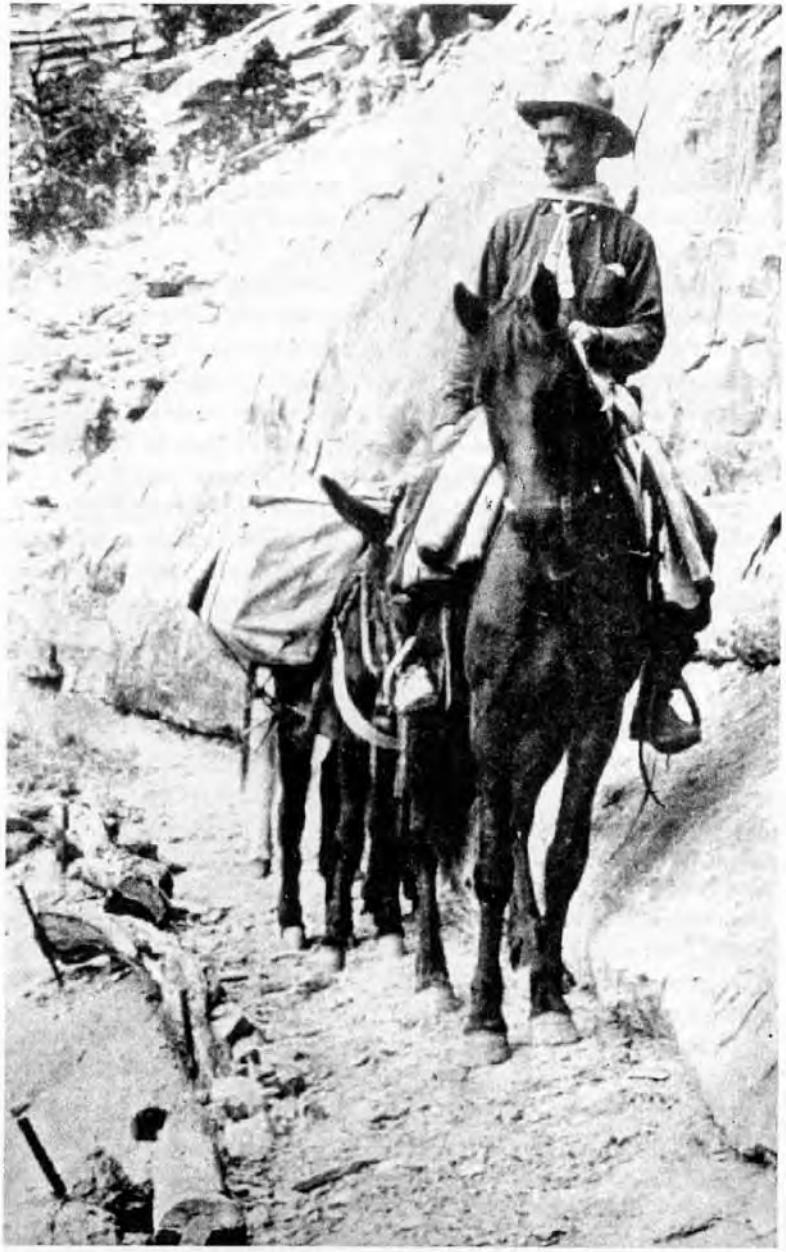
for a national park and helped him gain Congressional support by writing additional letters. With assistance from Representative Warren A. Haggott, Secretary of the Interior James R. Garfield, and Commissioner Richard A. Ballinger, Congress was persuaded to withdraw the land from public use.[54] This meant that private business and commercial interests could not buy or build anything on the land because it was now protected from development.

To anyone but Otto this would have been good news, but because he wanted a national park, anything less was unacceptable. Consequently he redoubled his efforts. He stepped up his letter campaign, sending numerous letters to newpaper editors, members of Congress, and even the president. In 1909 Otto wrote to President William H. Taft and invited him to visit the Grand Valley and Monument Park.[55] Otto also circulated a local petition in support of a national park.[56]

Along with petitionary measures and letter writing, Otto built trails and publicized his efforts. In February 1909, Otto put a silver pick and golden shovel in the window of the Star Stone Store to generate excitement about the dedication of Lincoln Monument and to bolster support for the building of a road to the canyon.[57] Later that spring, *The Daily Sentinel* reported that a committee from the Chamber of Commerce would investigate the area where Otto had been working.[58] The article explained that Otto worked in an "unknown section that had never been visited by local eyes."[59]

The committee reported amazement regarding Otto's accomplishments. How, in only the past eighteen months, had one man marked out so many foot trails and wagon trails over such rugged terrain? They described the trail through Monument Canyon as quite safe, descending gradually in a manner that allowed travelers to enjoy the beauty of the Grand Valley. It passed through canyon walls and gorges, ending at Evergreen Springs, which Otto had discovered and named. He had damned up the spring so that travelers could quench their thirst as they enjoyed the view of Columbus Monument that rose above it. Otto also informed the committee that he intended to extend the trail an additional two miles, creating a finished project of four miles.[60] *The Daily Sentinel* concluded its article about Otto's Trail by criticizing the locals for not taking full advantage of the canyons and suggesting a horseback ride through Monument Canyon to enjoy its beauty.[61]

Otto possessed an uncanny ability to select sections of canyons suitable for trails. He chose sites based on how well they displayed the



John Otto on Corkscrew Trail (Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.)

beauty of the canyons. His burros and horse carried supplies, including the hand tools—mainly picks and shovels—with which he worked. On occasion Otto used dynamite, and he used it well. He could select a location for optimal demolition because of his previous experience as a powder monkey on the pipeline project. The experience he gained as a miner also gave him the needed expertise to dig around small areas of land and rock in order to carve out the canyon trails.

Otto was a man on a mission, and his efforts continued to open peoples' eyes. On the Fourth of July, 1909, Otto caught the attention of local people by raising an American flag on the summit of Liberty Cap.[62] This publicity stunt demonstrated two things: that he had climbed Liberty Cap, no small feat, and that the five-mile trail to Liberty Cap had been completed.[63]

In 1909 the *Fruita Times* urged the city's Chamber of Commerce to construct a road that shortened the existing wagon road from Fruita to Monument Canyon. Such a road could benefit Fruita's businesses because residents on the Redlands would then be able to reach that town more easily and trade there instead of Grand Junction.[64] The county commissioners began to support Otto's trails because they felt it could develop into a good tourist attraction.[65] The railroad also recognized the potential tourism and photographers from the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad Company and the Colorado Midland arrived to capture the grandeur of the canyons. The Chamber of Commerce and Otto were on hand to take the men to the most scenic spots.[66]

As for Otto, he continued to build trails and publicize the idea of a national park. On September 27, 1909, *The Daily Sentinel* announced that the "famous Otto Trail has been completed."[67] Businessmen came to inspect Otto's Trail and marvel that he had done the work of five men in only a few months' time.[68] Their praise also went out to him for doing this with an expenditure of only $154, all raised by donations from local subscribers of *The Daily Sentinel*.[69] The paper assisted by publishing the names of those donating one dollar a month.[70] During the same month, President Taft visited Fruita to attend the Grand Valley Peach Festival. Otto wanted to take the president on a tour of Monument Canyon, show him the newly completed trails, and point out the other geological monuments he had named. Taft declined his offer, but it did not discourage Otto.[71]

With the Otto Trail complete, he focused on road building, hoping to build a road around the rim of the canyon. His proposal met

resistance from those wanting to build a road to Glade Park.[72] The people of Fruita and Glade Park wanted a road that skirted the canyons, made travel easier, and connected them to one another for economic reasons. Otto, on the other hand, envisioned a circuitous road to provide the most scenic view for travelers. Otto's view garnered important outside support in 1910 when Senator Simon Guggenheim introduced a bill to create the Monument National Park, setting aside $20,000 for a road through the park.[73] Although this bill did not pass, these developments indicated that people in Washington, D.C. were beginning to consider a park in western Colorado.

Otto's dedication to creating a national park caught the attention of the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce, winning their support for his cause. With such a powerful local entity in his corner, he could resume construction. Such support elated him—he now had a powerful ally who agreed to promote the scenic wonders in their backyard. However, while Otto thought mostly about preserving wilderness and making it accessible to people, the Chamber of Commerce was focused on generating money from tourists and business.[74]

With these new allies, plans for a park gained momentum. The Chamber of Commerce copied Otto's technique of letter writing. First, they targeted the governor of Colorado, who already knew the situation because of Otto's continuous stream of letters. Representative Edward Taylor from Glenwood Springs knew about the proposed park and introduced a bill in November 1909, that set aside land from the public domain in various Colorado cities and regions.[75] In January 1910, Secretary of the Interior Richard Ballinger decided to set aside the areas designated in Taylor's bill. From this point, *The Daily Sentinel* supported everyone who backed the park idea—Otto, the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce, Senator Guggenheim, and Representative Taylor. In addition, the newspaper publicized the canyons by printing word pictures describing the area as a heaven on earth waiting to be visited.[76]

However, because the canyons were still not a national park, Otto, with the help of Postmaster Edwin Price, Dr. S.P. Green, and S.B. Hutchinson, spearheaded another petition drive to establish a national park. Otto gathered 300 signatures on this petition and mailed it to Representative Taylor's office. With the citizens of Mesa County behind him, Taylor forwarded the petition to President Taft, who sent it to Congress. There, Representative Taylor and Senator Guggenheim argued on its behalf and persuaded Congress to ask the president to create a

National Monument.[77] Congress proposed a national monument instead of a national park because the area did not qualify for park status since it fell short by 5,000 acres.[78] Also, the logistics of creating a monument were simpler than that of a park because the Antiquities Act specified that creating a national monument required only the president's signature.

It appeared that John Otto's dream would become a reality. Representative Taylor informed *The Daily Sentinel* that the president had instructed the Department of Interior to examine the proposed area and determine its boundaries. Taylor suggested that someone familiar with the canyons accompany the inspector to show him the most scenic spots. Immediately Otto set out with two land office engineers to inspect the land in preparation for the inspector's arrival.[79] After submitting reports and meeting all provisions, only the president's signature was needed. On May 24, 1911, President Taft signed the proclamation establishing the 17,362 acre National Monument.[80] Although pleased, Otto was somewhat disappointed that the land was designated a national monument rather than a national park.

Problems soon arose over naming the Monument, and also about Otto's role in its operation and future development. The Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce felt that its support of the park entitled it to choose the name. The Chamber proposed Hooper National Park in honor of Major S.K. Hooper, who, for thirty years, was in charge of bringing tourists to the state in his capacity as the head of the passenger department for the Rio Grande Railroad. The town of Fruita proposed the name National Monument Park, and Otto suggested Smith National Monument Park because of all the Smiths residing in the Grand Valley. Representative Taylor's wife suggested the designation Colorado National Monument, and Taylor forwarded his wife's suggestion to the secretary of the interior for approval. Taylor also suggested that Otto become the custodian of the Monument and be paid one dollar a month for this duty.[81]

The National Monument designation presented Otto with a new series of obstacles. Since the Park Service was not yet created, responsibilities for raising money, writing regulations and enforcing them fell on the local promoters, mostly John Otto in this case.[82] His first act as custodian was to begin raising money to build a fence.[83] To explain and publicize regulations, he created a brochure titled *The Colorado National Monument Regulations*. Some locals, including ranchers from

John Otto and unidentified companion building ladder into Independence Monument

(Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.)

Glade Park, wanted to use the Monument like any other part of the public domain and fought against Otto's rules. When a couple of cattlemen, known as the Smithy brothers, drove their cattle over Otto's trails, he charged them with trespassing and asked the Federal Courts to intervene. The General Land Office notified the men that if their illegal use of the land continued, a hearing would be set before the U.S. district attorney.[84] Now backed by the federal courts, few others dared to cross the Monument without Otto's approval.

At this point John Otto began to divide his time between working on the monument and working for wages. He found the summers too hot for demanding labor on the Monument, so he worked for the U.S. Forest Service, earning eight dollars a month building trails over the Grand Mesa.[85] From late fall to mid spring, Otto turned his attention back to the Monument, thus creating for himself year round employment, but more importantly, year round service to his duties.

As busy as he was, Otto found the time to court and marry Beatrice Farnham, a Bostonian who traveled throughout the West painting scenes and getting to know westerners. About western men Miss Farnham often said: "No Easterner for me....Western men like intelligent women...they don't care for Eastern dolls with empty brains."[86] Beatrice's interest in Indian paintings led her to western Colorado, specifically the country between Grand Junction, the White River, and Unaweep Canyon. When asked how he and Beatrice became acquainted, Otto told everyone that they had met in California near Mt. Shasta, then again in Albuquerque, and later in Las Vegas. They admired each other's love of the outdoor life. Otto asked Beatrice to marry him, sealing the proposal by giving her a burro named Foxy as an engagement gift.[87]

While making preparations for the wedding, Otto continued his work on the Monument. He finished the ladder built into Independence Monument. His efforts were designed to make climbing the Monument easier for everyone.[88] He accomplished this by carving out footsteps and placing supporting pipe into the face of the rock. Beatrice continued painting and obtained a contract for interior decorating at the La Court Hotel in Grand Junction.[89] The wedding occurred on June 20, 1911, at the base of the 536 foot Independence Monument.[90] After the wedding Otto explained: "I don't believe in the modern form of marriage....I am doing it, not because I believe in the modern marriage system, but because I believe in obeying the law of the land."[91]

Beatrice assisted John with his duties as custodian. As a gift to the world, she announced that she would carve the Declaration of Inde-

John and Beatrice Otto. Reverand Hatch with book, James Keifer on Rev. Hatch's left, Fannie Hatch to Otto's left

(Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.)

pendence on a broad flat rock in Monument Canyon.[92] Today the last sentence of the Declaration and John Hancock's name can still be seen. She also pledged to establish Independence Colony, a school for girls where they could learn "about new ideals of a sane American life."[93] These ideals entitled young girls to live the natural life–one which eschewed cigarettes and cocktails, amenities which many believed were essential for the up-to-date female.

However, in August of 1911, Mrs. Otto left for Boston.[94] Then in March 1912, Otto explained that he and his wife had decided on a separation or furlough for five years; if things did not work out in that time, they would file for divorce.[95] Beatrice did not take five years to decide. On February 2, 1914, at her request, Otto obtained a decree for divorce on the grounds of desertion.[96] Several factors contributed to the divorce. Beatrice discovered her fear of heights on the narrow paths of the canyon walls. Also the lack of a stable home disheartened her; she confided to a friend that she "tried hard to live that way but could not do it....He wanted to live in tents or without tents, outdoors."[97]

Otto explained his feelings in letters to *The Daily Sentinel.* He never spoke a bad word of his former wife, saying the divorce was for business reasons, and that a lack of communication and differences in character, not a lack of love or affection, led to their separation.[98] He felt he had lost a good woman, friend, and companion, saying that he had "never looked at another woman, much less thought of one."[99] His feelings for her continued throughout the rest of his life, and before he died, he vowed to fix things "In the bright New World!"[100]

The failed marriage did not detract Otto from his dedication to the Monument. In December of 1911 he explained his ambition to begin a transcontinental highway linking Grand Junction to Moab, Utah, and other points west. To attract attention, he decorated the courthouse on December 15 with orange and red colors to commemorate George Washington's birthday. The colors, he explained, represented his transcontinental highway. Red stood for the Colorado apples and orange symbolized the oranges in California, where he envisioned the highway would reach.

On February 4, 1912, Otto began blasting for his transcontinental highway.[101] He planned to incorporate a route through the Colorado National Monument to make it easier for tourists to travel through the canyons. Residents of Grand Junction and Glade Park supported the idea because it linked their towns. Once the county engineer, James

Fisk, approved Otto's route and measurements, activities went into full gear.[102] The initial cost for blasting was $100, which was made available by the city and through Otto's fund raising efforts. The route was to begin on the Main Street Bridge going westward toward No Thoroughfare Canyon.[103]

The budget ballooned from a proposed $100 to $1,000, and, after Fisk's approval, $6,500 became the price tag for the job. Glade Park residents asked that the road be extended to Fruita to provide access to that community. Otto hoped that the highway would go all the way to San Diego and wrote the Secretary of the San Diego Highway Commission, winning his support. Men surveyed the projected route, and Glade Park residents volunteered their services, asking only for shares of stock sold by the Colorado River Auto Transportation and Toll Road Company. Otto had raised $250 to help the company.[104] The highway eventually reached Green River, Utah, in June 1913, but went no further than Moab, Utah, because of political differences of opionion between Otto and the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce.

Even though his transcontinental road had not been completed, Otto remained optimistic. In 1914 he received good news when President Wilson announced plans to make all national parks and monuments more accessible and enticing to tourists in an effort to keep Americans from going overseas as tourists and spending about $500 million a year there.[105] To centralize management of the parks, the government established permanent national park headquarters in San Francisco, which created a single administrative system for all the parks, as well as a plan to build more roads and trails for better access.[106]

To improve The Colorado National Monument, Otto knew he had to raise more money. After the first six months of Otto's custodianship, Washington Special Agent J.E. Connelly reviewed his reports and concluded that signs needed to be built, roads improved, and a lodge constructed for the caretaker.[107] Connelly praised Otto's efforts and hard work toward improving the Monument. After this endorsement, Otto found more financial support for projects. He used a registration book at the entrance of the Monument as a fundraiser by allowing visitors to sign it for a one-dollar donation.[108] He also went door-to-door asking people for their buffalo nickels. The Muscovites of the Odd Fellows gave twenty-four dollars and the hotelkeeper of the La Court Hotel gave another forty.[109] During World War I, Otto asked the Department of the Interior if he could harvest dead wood from the Monument and sell it

for firewood. The Department did not reply, so Otto began to sell the wood to locals for fifty cents a load–an activity which raised thirty-five dollars and five cents. He deposited this money in an account at the Bank of Grand Junction for the Colorado National Monument.[110] The Park Service immediately took the money and reprimanded Otto. Tensions were beginning to develop between Otto and park officials.

To publicize the Colorado National Monument Otto did many things. As he worked on his trails and formed new ones, he named wonders of nature after patriotic terms or famous Americans. He called a big rock detached from the main rim the Altar of Liberty.[111] Monoliths were dedicated to Thomas Paine, Alexander Hamilton, Ben Franklin, and Samuel Adams.[112] He also offered to guide a Boy Scout hike into the canyons for a two-day excursion. G.H. Marshall, the physical director at the YMCA, sponsored the outing and helped Otto lead the boys. Otto allowed the scouts to pick an unnamed monolith and christen it Boy Scout Monument.[113]

To stir interest in the Monument, Otto wanted to use the latest round of donations to bring in big game, hoping to entice animal lovers to visit. First he tried elk, but the climate in the canyons was too hot. He next focused on buffalo, hoping they would survive in the canyons. With his cache of buffalo nickels, he had enough money that the Game and Fish Department promised him three buffalo, two cows and one bull. They arrived from Denver, and even though the bull died because of the hot, dry weather, a herd of twenty-five eventually developed after Otto found another bull. Twenty-five was the maximum the area could sustain.[114] Otto watched over the animals, monitoring the availability of food and ensuring their safety.

Once the Park Service had been created, Otto became part of a bureaucratic operation. This marked the third stage in Otto's career—becoming a cog in a large organization. For a time Otto worked within the organization's boundries, but more and more he found bureaucracy too confining and the bureaucrats would find him impetuous, obstinate, and sometimes embarrassing. The Park Service's reprimand for selling dead wood from the Monument and setting up an independent bank account was the first of several clashes between Otto and park officials. Otto's realization that he was part of a bureaucratic machine became clear in 1915 when the National Park Service sent him to California to attend a conference with other park superintendents and custodians from around the country.[115] While there, Otto met the Director of the National

John Otto with his buffalo

(Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.)

Park Service, Stephen Mather, who befriended him and introduced him to other high officials in the Park Service.[116] Otto visited the University of Berkeley and met Ida Wheeler, its president. During this trip, Otto found ways to promote the Colorado National Monument. After the conference, he went to the office of *Sunset* magazine and gave them photos of the Grand Mesa and a story about his Union Trail. He also visited the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce to promote the Colorado National Monument.[117] Obviously, in Otto's view, being a part of the Park Service did not mean he should lessen his vigorous promotion of the Monument.

Meanwhile, others in the Grand Valley also intensified their efforts to promote the Colorado National Monument. *The Daily Sentinel* reported on December 13, 1916, that George Bullock, chairman of the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce, took a plea for aid to the Monument directly to Mather.[118] In addition, *The Daily Sentinel* urged the people of Grand Junction to visit the park. After all, according to the newspaper, the Monument near Grand Junction was one of the world's most scenic spots. Some local promoters believed that the Monument could surpass the Garden of the Gods in Colorado Springs in popularity and visitation.[119] *The Daily Sentinel* urged that the park be fenced, Otto's trails widened, and the Monument be advertised more aggressively. To promote all of this, the paper offered twenty-five dollars to any group willing to work towards these measures.[120]

While support for the Colorado National Monument grew, conflicting visions for it emerged. The Chamber of Commerce largely ignored John Otto and pursued its own agenda, leaving Otto confused and somewhat embittered. The Chamber denounced Otto's plans for Union Trail, and promoted instead its own plan for a road—the Midland Trail from Grand Junction through the Monument and into the Utah desert.[121] Later the Chamber asked Representative Taylor to seek $25,000 from Congress for roads. This, Taylor knew, would not get congressional support. The Chamber also set up a local National Park Committee to oversee affairs of the Monument and assist government and community efforts geared toward it. The Chamber of Commerce designated May 2, 1916, as "Good Road Day" to promote the construction of roads into the Monument. Later, in December, the Chamber of Commerce mapped a route through the Monument using Otto's Rim Rock Road plans, but gave him little credit officially.[122]

Federal officials also began to sidestep Otto because they tired of his constant letters and abstract ideas. One particular incident indi-

cated the extent of exasperation with Otto: The director of the Park Service planned to visit the Monument, but specified that Otto should not be present during his visit. The Chamber of Commerce secretary, the sheriff and the district attorney met to decide how to exclude Otto from the event. The sherriff suggested locking Otto up on a misdemeanor charge that no one would question until the visit was over. The agreed upon solution was that the supervisor of the Grand Mesa National Forest would send Otto out to build trails on the far recesses of the Mesa near the land of 300 Lakes.[123] After the director had come and gone, Otto discovered what had taken place. Although the incident stung him deeply, he continued to work tirelessly. However, he must have realized that many in the Grand Valley, as well as bureaucrats in the Park Service, saw him as an embarrassment, not the father of the Colorado National Monument.

Conflicting opinions about raods continued to surface. Glade Park residents petitioned for completion of a road to Grand Junction and promised $5,200 to support it. That amount of money caught the attention of county officials, and they began to investigate possible routes. Otto submitted his Union Trail again, but Mesa County engineers proposed a route through No Thoroughfare Canyon. Bruce Claybaugh, a Glade Park engineer, was asked to survey both routes. In November 1920, commissioners submitted requests for bids on both roads. During all this, Otto thundered that his route was the best and the most scenic too. Otto's route prevailed, and J.S. Shaw eventually got the contract, finishing the road in 1925 for $3,165 dollars.[124] It became known as Serpent's Trail. All this pleased Otto because it opened the heart of the canyons to visitors. Glade Park residents were appreciative that the road made it easier to drive cattle to the stockyards.

Despite a victory on the road issue, Otto's credibility eroded in the eyes of officials in Washington, D.C. and the Grand Valley. His stream of letters, ambitious ideas, and relentless appeals for aid grew wearisome to those who had to deal with them on a daily basis. By 1924 federal officials began to marginalize Otto by giving him fewer responsibilities concerning the Monument.[125] In July 1926, relations with local officials began to unravel quickly when Mayor Merriell of Fruita wrote to A.E. Demaray, the Acting Assistant Director of the National Park Service, to complain of Otto's exotic ideas and lack of substantial progress on projects. In January 1927, the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce said that Otto's poor judgement threatened the future of the Colo-

Automobile climbing Serpent's Trail

(Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.)

rado National Monument and joined those calling for his removal as custodian of it.[126] The Chamber of Commerce recommended that Merriell replace Otto as custodian. Privately, members of the Chamber of Commerce pointed out that from 1911-1927 the community had invested from $40,000 to $45,000 in roads, buffalo, and Otto's salary which now totaled twenty-five dollars a month.[127] With such an investment, the Chamber of Commerce felt it should now chart the future of the Monument. Calls for his removal caused Otto to lash out against the proposed Midland Trail and Merriell, who, Otto said, did not really love the park. Otto also pointed out that the skinflints in the town of Fruita had not helped out financially for the past ten years.[128]

The relationship between Otto, directors of the Colorado National Monument in Washington, D.C., and local business leaders had reached a breaking point. On February 28, 1927, Otto received an official letter of dismissal from the director of the Park Service.[129] The letter stated he was to be paid up to March 1, 1927, when his vouchers for a fence and other work were also to be submitted.[130] Otto took this all in stride, stating that he was going to enter politics and continue to support the Monument by giving advice and making plans. While the firing must have chagrined Otto there was perhaps some solace in the fact that he could return to operating as an individual, unencumbered by bureaucratic policy and officials scrutinizing his every move. As a private citizen he could still voice his opinions about the direction of the Colorado National Monument. After his dismissal Otto vigorously promoted the Monument unofficially by publishing bulletins, handbills, and advertisements in *The Daily Sentinel*.[131] Much of his energy went into letter writing, reporting on the buffalo, road conditions, and snow levels in the Monument. He continued to write to park officials inviting them to visit. When they did not reply, he would fire off another epistle checking up on the first.[132]

Debate over who would oversee the Monument remained an issue until April of 1927 when A.T. Gormley, a Grand Junction businessman, became custodian. Gormley liked Otto's fencing ideas and used the $400 appropriated by the National Park Service to begin the project.[133] Gormley's tenure was short—three months—because he objected to the government's red tape and Otto's constant writing about Gormley's incompetence.[134] Otto reminded the Park Service by letter that nothing had been accomplished in the Colorado National Monument since his firing. In October 1927, the Grand Junction Chamber of

Commerce took a crack at managing the Monument and immediately asked for an appropriation of $5,000 from Senator Lawrence Phipps to build a road from Monument Canyon to Independence Monument and a road across the entire park.[135]

Otto persistently wrote letters in an effort to establish the Colorado National Monument as a world renown park, but officials in the Park Service, and nearly everyone else, had tired of Otto and turned a deaf ear to him. In March 1931, he informed the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce that he had asked Secretary Wilburn to release $2,500 for roadwork on the property located on Rim Rock Road. Later, Chamber of Commerce President L.W. Burgess presented the Chamber's idea to extend Serpent's Trail as a scenic drive.[136] Obviously Otto had been the architect of this idea, but others presented it as their own. However, Otto knew there was little he could do about the situation.

A celebration in commemoration of the completion of the road connecting Grand Junction to Price, Utah, indicated to Otto that his ideas about the park mattered to no one.[137] During the celebration, W.M. Wood, with permission from Mr. Parvin, Colorado State Game and Fish Commissioner, shot two buffalo and two elk from the Monument that were then cooked and fed to those in attendance. The official justification was that all four animals were old. This incident infuriated Otto, who said the action was a slaughter. He asked the U.S. marshall's office to investigate the situation, but once again his request went unanswered.[138]

Although the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce sometimes employed Otto as a manager for minor jobs at the Colorado National Monument, he realized that there was little more he could accomplish in western Colorado. Having been completely shut out of all major Monument operations, Otto decided to leave for Yreka, California, in 1934.[139] His departure was uncharacteristic. He simply packed up his tent and told absolutely no one of his intentions. He wrote no letters and failed to inform *The Daily Sentinel* of his departure.[140] After arriving in California, Otto did keep in touch with *The Daily Sentinel*, telling of his actions in California and reiterating that the Colorado National Monument was the best park in the world. On March 8, 1952, Otto sent his last letter to the Park Service. In it he said that the Colorado National Monument was the "highest class park project in all creation."[141] John Otto died three months later at the age of seventy-three in California. On June 22, 1952, *The Daily Sentinel* informed the people of the Grand Valley of his death. The article complemented him for his hard work and that his dream had come true.

Otto's dream had come alive in the creation of the Colorado National Monument. Everyone agreed this man had been the catalyst for the Monument. In addition, the early dynamics between Otto and the community reveal much about attitudes toward wilderness in western Colorado from the early twentieth century to the Great Depression. First, as an eccentric visionary, Otto brought ideas from people such as John Muir to the Grand Valley and promoted them vigorously. His efforts were successful, in part, because America as a nation had developed a mindset of saving and preserving large areas of scenic land. However, many westerners opposed setting aside sections of the public domain, and Otto resolved this by arguing that the creation of the Colorado National Monument would enrich the local area by creating a network of roads and bring the dollars of tourists into the local economy. After the creation of the Monument, Otto entered the third stage of his career when he, the Park Service, and local officials became less and less comfortable with one another.[142]

During his pursuit and endless work, Otto created or carved twenty miles of trails with only a pick and shovel, and an occasional dynamite blast.[143] He worked on Liberty Cap, Ute Canyon, Coke Ovens, Monument Canyon, and many more areas to create trails such as Serpent's Trail and Otto's Trail. Al Look, who sometimes helped Otto build trails, said of him: "Otto was a one-man lobby, booster and builder when it came to the Colorado National Monument."[144] Few men could have endured weather, insult, setback, and lack of recognition for a job that was usually thankless and paid only one dollar a month. However, John Otto dreamed not of money, appreciation, or awards, but about serving nature and his fellow man. He accomplished this mostly through his own work and sweat. He is the individual the people of the Grand Valley should thank for the creation of the Colorado National Monument.

Notes

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[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 11.
[5] Ibid., 11-12.
[6] Ibid., 12.
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[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid., 16.
[10] Ibid., 26.
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[12] Ibid., 27.
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[14] Ibid., 30.
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[16] Ibid., 47.
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[19] Kania, *Colorado National Monument*, 13.
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[27] *The Denver Post*, 6 July 1969.
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[31] Patrick Sarver, "John Otto: Eccentric with a Vision," *National Parks and Conservation Magazine* 52 (November 1978): 4.
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[37] Ibid., 70.
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[43] Ibid.
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[45] Ibid., 108.
[46] Ibid.,143.
[47] Ibid., 130.
[48] Ibid., 132.
[49] Ibid., 133.
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[51] Lisa Schoch-Roberts, *A Classic Western Quarrel: A History of the Road Controversy at the Colorado National Monument* (Denver: U.S. Department of the Interior, n.d.), 14.
[52] *The Denver Post*, 6 July 1969.
[53] *The Grand Jucntion Daily Sentinel*, 6 February 1909. Hereafter cited as *The Daily Sentinel.*
[54] Kania, *Colorado National Monument*, 30.
[55] Schoch-Roberts, *A Classic Western Quarrel*, 18.
[56] *The Denver Post*, 6 July 1969.
[57] *The Daily Sentinel*, 6 February 1909.
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[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
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[62] Ibid., 9 July 1909.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Kania, *Trials and Trails*, 88.
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[67] *The Daily Sentinel*, 27 September 1909.
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[72] Schoch-Roberts, *A Classic Western Quarrel*, 21.
[73] Ibid., 22.
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[76] Ibid., 25.
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[78] Kania, *Colorado National Monument*, 34.
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[80] *The Denver Post*, 6 July 1969.
[81] Schoch-Roberts, *A Classic Western Quarrel*, 29.
[82] Look, *Colorado National Monument*, 12.
[83] Schoch-Roberts, *A Classic Western Quarrel*, 31.
[84] Ibid., 32.
[85] Kania, *Colorado National Monument*, 75.
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[88] Ibid., 150.
[89] Ibid.
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[91] Kania, *Trials and Trails*, 154.
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[95] Kania, *Trials and Trails*, 166.
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[109] Ibid., 43.
[110] Schoch-Roberts, *A Classic Western Quarrel*, 34.
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[112] Ibid.
[113] Kania, *Trials and Trails*, 208.
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[117] Ibid., 95.
[118] *The Daily Sentinel*, 13 December 1916.
[119] Ibid., 10 November 1916.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Schoch-Roberts, *A Classic Western Quarrel*, 37.
[122] Ibid., 38.
[123] Look, *Colorado National Monument*, 51.
[124] Schoch-Roberts, *A Classic Western Quarrel*, 40.
[125] Ibid., 46.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid., 45.
[128] Ibid., 46.
[129] Look, *Colorado National Monument*, 54.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid., 55.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Schoch-Roberts, *A Classic Western Quarrel*, 48.
[134] Look, *Colorado National Monument*, 55.
[135] Schoch-Roberts, *A Classic Western Quarrel*, 49.
[136] Kania, *Colorado National Monument*, 134.
[137] Ibid., 111.
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[139] *The Daily Sentinel*, 7 February 1971.
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Book Review

The Utes: A Forgotten People. By Wilson Rockwell (Ouray, CO: Western Reflections, Inc., 1998, reprint, pp. 307. Paperback, $19.95).

With the reissue of Wilson Rockwell's *The Utes,* Western Reflections has made a classic of the Western Slope available to another generation of scholars and general readers. When this book appeared nearly a half century ago, most reviewers heralded it as a sound historical study, and scholars since then have relied on it as an important source on the Utes.

Most on the Western Slope will recognize the name Wilson Rockwell as a former Colorado Senator and author of other books about our part of the state, such as *Sunset Slope* and *Uncompahgre Country.* Readers appreciate his familiarity with the Western Slope, and nod approvingly when he describes scenes with preciseness drawn from personal observation. He locates historical events with references to modern-day towns like Austin, Hotchkiss, Paonia, and Gunnison. He supports his personal knowledge with credible sources–personal interviews, the CWA interviews for the State Historical Society, and published materials.

The Utes consists of 35 short chapters. The first seven discuss the ethnography, oral traditions, dances, religion, social organization, mode of subsistence, and material culture of the Utes. The bulk of the book–approximately the next twenty chapters–deal with Ute leaders and relations with Hispanics and Anglo-Americans, and the final chapters survey reservation life. Readers wanting information about Indian agen-

cies and agents will find the book useful. Bloodshed receives considerable attention in *The Utes.* It contains over 50 pages on the Meeker Massacre, and three chapters deal with armed conflicts after the Utes moved to reservations. *The Utes* contains 53 illustrations, a bibliography, and an index. The volume is footnoted, and includes five appendices containing the text of treaties and firsthand accounts of the Meeker Massacre.

Rockwell humanizes many of his subjects. He lavishes praise on both Ouray and Chipeta. Good, short character sketches make Buckskin Charley and Ignacio into multi-dimensional characters. Sometimes Rockwell renders harsh judgments, characterizing Kanneatche as "quite a carouser" (page 91), and pronouncing Colorow "a ponderous, overrated, blustering Ute" (page 124). The Ute's folklore, such as that about Grand Lake, will stick in reader's minds. Can any reader forget the treaty-making trip to Washington, D.C. when elephants, camels, monkeys, and baboons at a circus and zoo impressed them much more than President Ulysses S. Grant?

The book contains references that remind scholars how much remains to be written about the Western Slope. A general store named Hugus & Co. in Meeker (p. 179), C.P. Hill's Trading Post at Rangely (p. 180), Buckskin Charley, and boarding and vocational schools for Utes all deserve more attention from those who write history.

It is good to see *The Utes* back in print. Those already familiar with it will welcome an opportunity to get an inexpensive edition, and new readers will find it a useful introduction to the Ute people.

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