

Zion National Park Historic Trails System,
West Rim Trail
Zion National Park
Springdale vicinity
Washington County
Utah

HAER No. UT-40-G

HAER

UTAH

27-SPDA-Y

1G-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Zion National Park Historic Trails System, West Rim Trail

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Location: Zion National Park
Springdale vicinity, Washington County, Utah

Date of Construction: 1925-26; Alterations - 1935, 1956, 1960, 1969, 1984

Architect/Designer: Thomas C. Vint and Walter Ruesch
Zion National Park

Present Owner: National Park Service
U. S. Department of the Interior

Present Use: Horseback/hiking trail

Significance: Built of native stone and associated with the "National Park Service-Rustic" architectural style, the West Rim Trail possesses architectural integrity. Rock used in the masonry switchback walls was quarried locally and shaped as little as possible to provide a rough appearance, yet stable construction.

Researcher: James Jurale
September 4, 1984

Work on the West Rim Trail began in 1925. It was officially dedicated on July 11, 1926, at a ceremony held at the time of the visit of Crown Prince Gustavus and Princess Louise of Sweden. It took two years to build, at an estimated cost of \$125,000. Construction work on the Refrigerator Canyon portion of the trail resumed in 1935 under the supervision of Zion National Park building foreman, Walter Ruesch, and Park Engineer, A. E. Cowell, who was on temporary assignment from the Branch of Engineering in San Francisco, California.

Starting from the parking area across the highway from the Grotto Picnic Area, the trail crosses the Virgin River by means of an arched metal footbridge that was installed in 1984. The trail, which leads to the top of the west rim of Zion Canyon, is 5.5 miles long. Walter's Wiggles, 17 complete switchbacks, were carved into some of the park's most difficult terrain and buttressed with locally-quarried, grouted sandstone blocks. Rock used in the Wiggles and in other "dry" retaining walls was shaped as little as possible to "provide a stable construction with as rough an appearance as could be obtained." The trail was re-marked in 1933 and 1934 by Public Works Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps personnel.

After crossing the Virgin River, the trail runs along a talus slope for about 1/2 mile by means of numerous dry-laid random rubble sandstone walls. The next 1/4 mile traverses a sheer cliff and rises more than one thousand feet. The trail is half tunneled into the sides of the cliff. The trail then runs through a narrow notch in the drainage known as Refrigerator Canyon. From here, Walter's Wiggles, a series of switchbacks up a 60-degree chimney, brings us to Scout's Lookout.

For the remaining three miles of its course, the trail winds along the rim and across numerous side canyons. Then it drops into a deep canyon and begins the ascent of the sheer rim of Horse Pasture Plateau. The West Rim Trail was reconstructed in 1956, 1960 and 1969 to repair masonry, replace bridges, and to install guard rails at a combined cost of \$100,000. Repaving and additional improvements were carried out in 1984.

Landscape architects responsible for trail design include H. B. Stephenson, who represented the Branch of Plans and Design for the work done on the Refrigerator Canyon in 1935. He was succeeded by Landscape Architect George Norgard.

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