A helicopter landed at Tuweep Airstrip in barren Toroweap Valley. It left President Clinton and Secretary Babbitt near the north rim of the Grand Canyon. A table and chair, hastily borrowed from Tuweep Ranger Claire Robert’s home several miles away, were the only props as the President signed a proclamation creating the Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument. This million-acre monument will be managed jointly by the Arizona Strip Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Lake Mead National Recreation Area of the National Park Service (Lake Mead). Two hundred thousand acres are on lands administered by Lake Mead and 800,000 are on lands administered by the BLM. The monument was created for its geological, archaeological, and historical resources, as well as for the traditional western ranching and Native American life ways associated with it.

The area is remote and rugged. The closest towns are St. George, Utah, and Bunkerville, Nevada, each a full hour from the monument’s nearest edge. There are no paved roads or services in the monument. Generally, the roads become progressively worse the farther south one drives. This truly feels like a “land that time forgot.” As such, it fits well within the BLM’s new National Landscape Conservation System.

The monument includes portions of the Colorado Plateau and the Great Basin physiographic provinces. Elevations range from 1,500 feet to over 8,000 feet. Vegetation of the lower Mohave Desert region includes Joshua tree forests; the mesas and plateaus support pinyon and juniper; the highest mountains have forests of Ponderosa pine.

Just as the topography and environment of this new national monument are diverse, so too were past human occupations and uses. To date, archaeological research on the monument has been extremely limited. A number of small surveys have been conducted, and Lake Mead completed some larger inventories on the Shivwits Plateau. Approximately two percent of the Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument has been inventoried for cultural resources — which leaves about 980,000 acres left to walk. No archaeological excavations have been conducted in the monument.

People occupied this landscape for thousands of years, with Archaic sites the earliest sites known thus far. These are represented primarily by points and large, open sites. More research would almost certainly increase the count of early sites.

The majority of sites recorded thus far relate to the Ancestral Puebloan (Anasazi) occupation, perhaps beginning as early as several hundred years B.C., and lasting until at least A.D. 1250. Nearby Ancestral Puebloan sites that have been excavated and dated, at Colorado City and at the Pinenut Site on the Kanab Plateau, show occupation to at least A.D. 1250. The diverse sites include artifact scatters, rock art, villages, fieldhouses, and trails, indicating that puebloan occupation and use of the monument was extensive.

The monument is located within the heartland of the Virgin Anasazi. This westernmost branch of the Anasazi (Ancestral Puebloan) culture area stretches from Las Vegas, Nevada, east along the Virgin River and south to the Colorado River and the Grand Canyon. It is possible that the monument area was a production zone for several of the ceramic types found in the Virgin Anasazi area. Olivine (peridot) temper has long been recognized as a distinguishing characteristic of the Moapa plain and corrugated wares of the Virgin Anasazi. To date, source areas for such olivine have been found only on the southern Uinkaret Plateau at Vulcan’s Throne, Mt. Trumbull, and Mt. Emma. Olivine-tempered wares are found west,
north, and northwest of Mt. Trumbull wherever Virgin Anasazi sites occur. Future research on the monument may explore evidence for where this pottery was produced and how it was distributed.

Oral migration histories from several clans of the Hopi Tribe, living descendants of the Ancestral Puebloan people, tell us they lived within the Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument.

Linguistic evidence suggests the Southern Paiute may have arrived in northern Arizona around A.D. 1100-1150, which implies an overlap with the Ancestral Puebloan occupation. This is a major archeological question still to be answered.

It is certain that Southern Paiute were on the landscape when the first EuroAmericans arrived. The expeditions of Spanish explorers Dominguez and Escalante in 1776, and later Antonio Armijo in 1829, all occurred immediately north of the monument. Mormon settlers arrived in the 1850s and began to occupy and explore the area. Southern Paiute families living on and near the limited water resources of the region were probably immediately displaced. Southern Paiute response to the EuroAmerican occupation was mixed. Some were baptized and joined the Mormon settlements; some remained in remote and isolated portions of the Arizona Strip as late as the 1920s. The first ethnographies of the Southern Paiute resulted from John Wesley Powell’s expeditions to map and study the region in the 1870s. Living descendants of these early Southern Paiutes can be found today at the Kaibab Paiute Reservation at Pipe Springs, Arizona; the Shivwits Reservation, west of St. George, Utah; the Moapa Reservation at Moapa, Nevada; and scattered among the Paiute Indian tribes of Utah.

A young Southern Paiute man from the Shivwits Reservation approached me during a field trip to the Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument last February and asked if I knew where Sanup Mountain was. He said it was where his grandfather had lived. I had never heard of it, so we looked on the Arizona Strip map and found Sanup Plateau. It is located within the present boundaries of Grand Canyon National Park, immediately south of the monument. During the course of that one-day field trip, several other Paiutes quietly asked us to show them other landmarks they had heard about their entire lives from their grandparents. Place names like Parashont Wash, the Pakoon, Toroweap Valley, Shivwits Plateau, Uinkaret Plateau, and Mociac all tell us the Southern Paiute were here before any English or Spanish-speaking person arrived.

Making a living on the land has always been difficult within the monument and on the Arizona Strip. A few ranchers and dry land farmers homesteaded on remote family ranches. The Grand Gulch Copper Mine operated from the 1880s to the 1920s and then intermittently until the 1960s. In the 1870s, large Ponderosa pine logs were hauled to St. George, Utah, by wagon to construct the Mormon Temple. Today, that wagon road is called the Temple Trail, and it stretches some 70 miles from Mt. Trumbull along the top of the Hurricane Cliffs and down into the St. George Basin.

Alfonzo Ortiz’s characterization of the entire Southwest seems particularly apt for the Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument:

Here, truly, the imagination soars and the very spirit is set free.